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the first of these is the fact that the
 system is not self-sufficient. It
 requires a constant supply of
 raw materials and energy. The
 second is that the system is
 not flexible. It is unable to
 adapt to changing conditions.

The third is that the system
 is not sustainable. It is
 unable to maintain itself over
 the long term. The fourth is
 that the system is not
 equitable. It is unable to
 provide for the needs of all.

The fifth is that the system
 is not efficient. It is unable
 to use resources in the most
 effective way. The sixth is
 that the system is not
 innovative. It is unable to
 develop new solutions.

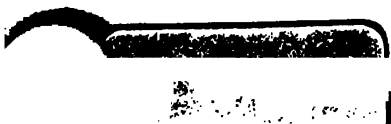
The seventh is that the
 system is not transparent.
 It is unable to provide
 information to the public. The
 eighth is that the system is
 not accountable. It is unable
 to be held responsible for its
 actions.

The ninth is that the system
 is not inclusive. It is unable
 to involve all stakeholders. The
 tenth is that the system is
 not resilient. It is unable to
 withstand shocks and stresses.

The eleventh is that the
 system is not secure. It is
 unable to protect itself from
 threats. The twelfth is that
 the system is not healthy.
 It is unable to maintain a
 balanced and stable state.

The thirteenth is that the
 system is not just. It is
 unable to promote fairness and
 equity. The fourteenth is that
 the system is not peaceful.
 It is unable to resolve conflicts
 in a non-violent manner.

The fifteenth is that the
 system is not sustainable.
 It is unable to meet the needs
 of future generations. The
 sixteenth is that the system
 is not ethical. It is unable to
 uphold moral principles.





FROZEN HEARTS.

A Romance.

BY

G. WEBB APPLETON.

"I am now dissolved :
My frozen soul melts ; may each sin thou hast
Find a new mercy : rise, I am at peace :
Had'st thou been thus, thus excellently good,
Before that devil king tempted thy frailty,
Sure thou had'st made a star."
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.—*The Maid's Tragedy.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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1878.

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FROZEN HEARTS.

BOOK II.—*continued.*

CHAPTER XII.


A BIRTHDAY GIFT.

THE day following the interview at the Hôtel de Rauville was Gervaise's *fête*, and the Vicomte resolved to signalise the event and make it a red-letter day in her history, by unfolding a little scheme he had had for a week in course of secret preparation. Father Joseph was entrusted with the duty of attending to the necessary formalities for bringing the processes of the law to bear upon Michaud ; a task upon which he entered with great alacrity and zeal, so that the Vicomte, setting apart a few hours in the evening for a

visit to the Rue de Picpus, was free to devote the remainder of the day to the execution of his project.

Gervaise's master—one Papillon—was an amiable, kind-hearted old fellow, with a face perfectly round and ruddy, and a form as sleek and well-preserved as one of his own skins; who had acquired a modest competency by twenty years' careful attention to his business, and a lifetime of frugal and temperate practices. That his ulterior purpose had been, in case his industry were suitably rewarded, to put a limit to his glove-making career, was probable, from his having long fixed a covetous eye upon a certain *maisonette* at Auteuil, with a trim garden in which he felt he could indulge, with great satisfaction to himself, certain horticultural instincts which had been germinating beneath the good man's nightcap for many a year past.

It so happened that the owner of the *maisonette* in question died this very summer, and the property was offered for sale. This intelligence, *couleur de rose*, soon found its way to M. Papillon, who felt that the propitious moment in his life had come at last.



The result was that after a lengthy conference with Madame Papillon, who, be it known, had materially contributed to the worthy man's success, he decided to become a *propriétaire*, and enjoy his *otium cum dignitate* among strawberries and roses.

Thereupon, finding among his workmen no one either of sufficient means, prospective or actual, to purchase outright, or endowed with the necessary business capacity to warrant the founding of the succession upon a purely credit basis, he inserted a modest advertisement in a morning journal, offering his business for sale, and anxiously awaited the issue. It seemed after all to be a serious thing, this sundering, in one sense, his connection with himself, and there were moments when even the prospective joys of horticulture were powerless to avert gloomy forebodings as to the possible amount of deterioration that might befall the famous Papillon gloves, in the hands of an inexperienced or unscrupulous successor.

It so chanced that about this time the Vicomte d'Harmontal was casting about him for some opportunity to testify, in a substantial

manner, his kindly regard for his new *protégés*, Pitou and Gervaise. He had installed the former, immediately upon his return from his visit to Laferrière, as a sort of factotum in his hôtel, promising a more definite career when occasion should offer. Accident throwing in his way the advertisement of le Sieur Papillon, a new light suddenly irradiated his, until now, somewhat chaotic purpose. To somehow unite the two destinies in a common weal and interest, had been his favourite design. This, hitherto, had seemed of difficult accomplishment ; now the road was open to the desired end. He threw down the journal, and repaired at once to the little glove shop in the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs.

Gervaise, in a delicious flutter as usual when he appeared, extended the tips of her tiny fingers to be shaken (this she had done ever since that memorable dinner at the Palais Royal), and chirruped away like a young magpie as she smoothed out the wrinkles, and fastened with much deftness the Vicomte's gloves. When she had concluded this operation, and looked up for his customary words of approval, he astonished

the little woman by suddenly asking to see M. Papillon.

Papillon's figure, however, was visible through a glass partition at the rear of the shop, and his rubicund face, summoned by a gesture from Gervaise, soon appeared at the doorway.

"*Serviteur*, M. le Vicomte !" he said, pulling at the tassel of a little passementé skull-cap he invariably wore, and which, according to local tradition, had accompanied him into the world as a sort of caul.

"Papillon, I desire a few minutes' conversation with you," said D'Harmontal, in his most amicable manner.

Papillon pulled at his tassel again, and assumed an attitude of respectful attention.

"In private," added the Vicomte, with a significant look at Papillon, which had the effect of hopelessly confusing the good man's wits.

Gervaise, though startled at the suggestion of whispered and mysterious confidences his words conveyed, felt suddenly awakened in her an intense curiosity to know what it could

all mean, and grew proportionately indignant at Papillon's stupidity.

"M. le Vicomte said he wanted to see you in PRIVATE!" she shouted, rapping an accompaniment on the counter with a glove-stretcher.

Papillon, aroused by her voice, felt that an unlooked-for emergency had arisen in his life. A horrible fear came upon him.

"He wants to buy my *maisonette*," thought he, with his heart sinking to zero.

A spiral staircase led its tortuous way from the rear of the shop to a snug apartment upon the *entresol*, consisting of a *salon*, a *salle à manger*, a kitchen and three chambers, one of which was occupied by Gervaise. Into the *salon* the Vicomte was immediately conducted. Papillon handed him a chair, and stood wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"Be seated, my good man," said D'Harmontal; then looking approvingly about the room, he added: "You are very snug here, Papillon. Quite an air of *bien-être* and comfort seems to fill the place."

"*Comme ça*, monsieur," said Papillon with a sickly smile—at any other time he would

have been delighted by the compliment. "I am not a millionaire; but the world has not exactly used me ill."

"*Pardieu!* no! I should think not; and so you are about to retire from business, I hear!"

"*Diantre!*" thought Papillon in despair; "it is just as I expected, he wants my *maisonette*."

"I suppose," continued D'Harmontal, "that you have picked up some *château*, eh! Papillon, with a lawn and a bit of woodland, and a tench-pond? Something good and cheap that some wild-cap young fellow, like myself, has gambled into the auctioneer's hands, eh!"

After a preliminary sigh of relief which carried off the whole dismal burden of his fears, Papillon burst into a roar of laughter.

"No! no! no!" he exclaimed gleefully; "we *bourgeois* are not as ambitious as our fathers of '93. No! no! A little *maisonette* only; a small garden, a strawberry-bed, a cucumber-frame, and a vine or two. A matter of a few thousand francs only."

"Capital! And people passing by and

admiring your well-kept garden, will say, when they have inquired the owner's name, 'That comes from making good gloves,' eh ! Papillon !"

At that Papillon roared again, and now, feeling in the best of spirits, he rang and ordered a bottle of Montrachet, which madame, availing herself of the opportunity, brought in person. She courtesied to the Vicomte as she placed it on the table, and wondered, as she had been doing for some minutes from a secure point of espial in the adjoining room, what it all could possibly mean, doubly mystified as she now was by a wink and a nod from her lord, that were meant to be slily reassuring as to the safety of the *maisonette*.

When the Vicomte had helped himself to a glass of wine, and approved its quality, he said :

"I understand that you offer your business for sale !"

Papillon nodded corroboratively.

"Have you found a customer yet ?"

"Plenty of offers—plenty of offers, but no customers," said Papillon complacently. "I

have a name, such as it is, and a reputation, M. le Vicomte, which I cannot afford to entrust into the first comer's hands" (here Papillon looked very grave). "*Ancienne Maison Papillon* will naturally appear on the new sign-boards, bill-heads, cards and the like, not to speak of the gloves, which of a necessity must still bear my name. That name, however, must not be dishonoured by bad workmanship. A year hence, one might buy a pair of gloves bearing that name; they would, we will say, rip and tear with the first attempt to put them on. 'Hang and quarter that Papillon for an old *fripou*!' one would naturally say. I could not afford that, monsieur. I must dispose of my business to some one who will maintain the honour and dignity of the house."

"You are quite right; and you have not yet found such a person?" said the Vicomte.

"No, monsieur."

"Your skilled workmen would remain with your successor, would they not?"

"Without doubt. In any case there are plenty of skilled workmen. It is a matter of

judicious supervision, of a careful selection of materials, and a correct taste in colour."

"Just so. Mademoiselle Gervaise is a very good sort of a girl, is she not? Industrious, painstaking; well' qualified for her position?"

Papillon opened his eyes quite wide, and surveyed the Vicomte attentively a moment before replying. The latter, pouring out another glass of wine, affected not to see the movement.

"Mademoiselle is the best little girl I have ever had in my shop," said Papillon, at length. "I should stipulate, in any case, that she should not be sent adrift."

"Right, Papillon! quite right! But would she not make a worthy successor, in whose hands your good reputation would be perfectly secure? But then she has no money, of course."

Papillon, opening his eyes a little wider, and cocking his head on one side like an inquisitive robin, looked at the Vicomte without replying.

"That wouldn't please you, eh, Papillon!" said D'Harmontal, at length.

"Nothing better would please me, if, as you say, she only had the money. She would never disgrace the house, I quite agree with you there."

"Umph! It is a pity."

"What the devil *is* he driving at?" thought Papillon, with difficulty repressing a tendency to scratch his head in his perplexity.

"How much do you ask for your business, Papillon?" said the Vicomte suddenly.

"Fifteen thousand francs—goodwill, stock, fixtures, and lease—*une misère, une misère.*"

"The furniture of these rooms included?"

"With the exception of a few ornaments and family relics—yes."

"When can you give possession?"

"Within a week."

"You are sure?"

"I am positive."

"Under a forfeit?"

"If it is desired—yes."

"Then I will buy it. When your papers are ready you shall have your money."

Papillon, stupefied at first, burst into a loud laugh, which was promptly stifled with his handkerchief.

"There was a King Louis who was a locksmith, but I never heard of a nobleman of France becoming a glover," he said at last. "But young gentlemen will have their little whims and follies."

"Excuse me, Papillon, but you appear to be dull of comprehension to-day. Can you not see that I wish to purchase the business for Gervaise?"

"Oh! for Gervaise, I see," Papillon said, throwing himself back in his chair, and indulging in a little dry chuckle. "Yes, yes. She is lucky. I did not think you took *that* sort of interest in her, M. le Vicomte."

"What do you mean, Papillon?" said D'Harmontal, with a perceptible contraction of his brow. "No jokes at her expense, if you please. She is a good little girl, who will shortly marry a favourite servant of mine, and in this way I intend to make suitable provision for both."

Somewhat crestfallen, Papillon mopped his face, and said, with an accompaniment of vigorous nods:

"Ah, that is good in you, monsieur; that is a generous thing indeed."

“*N'importe*, now that you understand me ; but one thing more ; does Gervaise know of your intention to sell the business ?”

“Not yet.”

“Then keep it a profound secret, withdraw your advertisement, and let not a single hint of your intention escape your lips. This day week will be her birthday, by then the papers must all be prepared ; the deed of assignment shall be at once her birthday present and wedding portion.”

Papillon, in high glee at the pleasant course events were taking, promised implicit compliance with the Vicomte's conditions, as he reconducted him to the shop. Gervaise was at breakfast, and Madame Papillon had just taken her place at the counter ; she had heard most of the conversation through the crack of the dining-room door. Papillon knew this, from a long familiarity with her habits, and thinking to counteract any over manifestation of it on her part, he whispered to the Vicomte, as he opened the street-door :

“I shall tell *her* all about it at once. She will approve of it, I know.”

“M. le Vicomte and you appear to be very

intimate," said Gervaise in the course of the afternoon. Papillon stroked his chin, and showed all his teeth; and said, "that the Vicomte knew where to buy good gloves."

Gervaise was not satisfied. From that time forth, an air of mystery pervaded the place. Where she had hitherto been treated with kindness, she was now regarded with a sort of deference ; and even a long familiarity with the good man's honest exuberances did not blind her to the fact, that an unconscionable number of winks and nods and sly nudges of the arms were constantly passing between master and mistress. Frequent allusion, too, was made in her presence to sweethearts and wedding breakfasts, and the general desirability and snugness of connubial relations ; and once she found herself growing very indignant when, dropping generalities, Papillon asked her with much seriousness why she did not marry some young fellow in the glove business, and settle down to it for good. She resented this as a possible insinuation that Pitou, who had fought behind a barricade (though to be sure that was a secret), and had dined with a Vicomte, might be

intrinsically and morally inferior to a glover. To crown her perplexity, master and mistress were often absent during the week ; and once a lawyer with a black bag was with them for many hours in the little salon.

The week glided swiftly by, and the memorable day broke happily in sunshine, at last. Gervaise sprang lightly from her bed, opened the casement, sniffed with much satisfaction the frosty air, then nodding approvingly to herself in the glass, she said : " Gervaise, you young minx, you are twenty years old ; at this rate you will need spectacles and a snuff-box soon." Then she pulled out from under the bed a pair of new boots, very dainty and pretty, which had evidently been reserved for gala wear ; then a new dress, smelling strongly of lavender flowers, followed, and — But this sort of thing won't do, so shutting the door quickly, we merely say that it was not without much giggling, and a frequent bird-like twittering of fragments of song, and much tipping over of the mirror to get a better view of the " set " of skirts, that her toilette was at last completed. She had a holiday, of course, and she was to meet Pitou punctually

at nine o'clock, as she had done upon every recurring *fête* since she was sixteen. And though the season had been at times too far advanced to permit of a trip to St. Cloud or St. Germain, they invariably contrived to spend a happy day somewhere, the memory of which was stowed away in that little golden-thatched head, as something inestimably precious and dear.

Upon the last occasion the rain had poured down in unbroken liquid spines from morning to night ; the grass was sodden and spongy in the parks and gardens, and a nipping cold made everybody uncomfortable, except cooks in roaring kitchens, and our two lovers, whose joyousness could not be dimmed by any possible combination of the elements.

The programme of the day, of Pitou's devising, was as follows : A breakfast at the Rocher de Cancale, a ride to St. Cloud, a dinner at Auteuil, and two *fauteuils d'orchestre* at the *spectacle* in the evening.

To Pitou's surprise, his master manifested a sudden curiosity to know how he intended to pass the day.

This was the night before, and after he

had been looking over some items of household expenditure, submitted to him by his factotum.

"Well! I have nothing to do to-morrow," he said, yawning. "Father Joseph will be absent upon important business. I think, upon the whole, that I should like a drive to-morrow. When you have had your breakfast, bring Gervaise here. I shall have my team of greys ready, and I shall take you to St. Cloud myself, upon condition that you dine with me upon our return to town."

Pitou, stupefied, imparted the intelligence to Gervaise at breakfast the next morning. Whereupon she clapped her hands, and averred upon her honour, that if he wasn't a Vicomte, and Pitou was to be very cross to her, that she should fall head over ears in love with him—he was "*si bon ! si gentil !*"

The greys bowled along in splendid style, the dry leaves scudding after them in the breeze, and the gaunt branches rattling over their heads as they dashed through wooded avenues, while the pit-pat of the iron shoes on the hard road caused the stone-breakers to pause in their work, with uplifted hammers

and approving glances, as they passed. The wind blew shrill and loud up Seine Valley, and when they crossed the bridge of Passy, Gervaise's hair getting loose, streamed out like a perturbed nimbus, and was with difficulty captured again; while her hat was of necessity tied under her chin, and her cheeks glowed like a furnace, and her eyes reflected the bright November sparkle of the air. The sharpened contours of the hills, the gaunt forest trees, close serried like an army in order of battle; the denuded parterres, with flowers everywhere in trim winter quarters under glass—all bespoke the coming of the season of frost and snows, and lent exhilaration to the spirits, and an extra throb to the pulse of our holiday-makers.

St. Cloud, abandoned by the court, looked a little deserted, though sentinels paced in front of the Château gates, but descending at the *Lion d'or*, they forgot all about that as they gathered around a roaring fire of logs, and clinked their glasses and wished for many happy returns of the day.

Then when the horses' heads were turned homeward, and the landlord of the *Lion d'or*

had bowed a perfect crick into his back at the gate, and the golden dome of the Invalides at last blazed up like a crown upon the imperial city, and Gervaise was obliged to sit closer to Pitou, and use him as a screen to keep off the wind that still snarled through the valley, then the Vicomte, with an affectation of indifference that would have been quite charming for anybody in the secret to behold, requested to know at what hour they would dine, and asked as a particular favour to a famishing man, that it might be left to him to decide. Then when this was granted, amid much laughing, the Vicomte suddenly remembered that he had a little birthday gift for Gervaise—a mere bagatelle, which he would stop and pick up on his way to dinner.

Gervaise, scenting a locket or a bit of lace in the air, blushed with pleasure; and Pitou gave her a sly nudge, and looked up at the stars, or where the stars at least would shortly appear, as much as to say: "Was there ever such a man!" To which Gervaise replied with a shake of her golden mane, that implied all the impossibilities.

Down the Avenue de Neuilly, past the

unfinished Arc , de Triomphe, through the the Champs Elysées, into the Rue Royal with a dreadful clatter, the Rue St. Honoré, Place Vendôme, what! Rue - Neuve - des - Petits - Champs ?”

“ Yes—oh yes, we *must* stop a moment.”

“ At M. Papillon’s, then ?”

D’Harmontal laughed, as he leaped to the ground ; the groom quietly took the reins.

“*Descendez, descendez !*” said the Vicomte, still laughing.

When they had alighted, off flew the horses and turned like a flash into the Rue d’Antin, and out of sight and hearing.

“ Oh ! M. le Vicomte wants a pair of gloves—oh ! I see,” said Gervaise ; and as this perception flashed upon her, she felt herself wondering whether the neighbours had observed her arrival in such great state.

“ Of course I do. Come in both of you,” said D’Harmontal, with a strange twinkle in his eyes.

Papillon, all radiant, with a blue coat, brass buttoned, and Madame Papillon, similarly radiant, though stiff and upright in a brocade dress, which would nowhere yield to her

frantic attempts at an obeisance, appeared upon the threshold, and welcomed them. Through the glass partition, separating the workshop, appeared a row of curious faces belonging, as Gervaise saw at a glance, to the workpeople.

The Vicomte was the first to speak.

"M. Papillon," he said, "I promised mademoiselle a present on her birthday. You were good enough to keep it for me until my arrival. You have it ready, I suppose?"

Papillon pulled forth a voluminous parchment, and advanced in the manner, but without the gravity, of a provincial mayor about to present an address to the prince of the realm, and handed it to the Vicomte, who in turn placed it in Gervaise's hands.

"It is yours ; accept it with my best wishes, mademoiselle," he said.

Gervaise, as one in a dream, opened it ; saw much writing, and an enormous seal. At the bottom she perceived a signature like a spider's web, and not dissimilar to one she had frequently seen attached in the form of a receipt to Papillon's bills.

•

"Why! it looks like a doctor's prescription!" she said, in perfect bewilderment at the curious aspect of the gift.

While everybody was yet giggling, and Gervaise, with the document upside down, was endeavouring to decipher the great seal, Papillon came forward with a bunch of keys.

"We shall drop in often and see you, Gervaise—madame and I," he said, putting them in her hand. Stamp, stamp, suddenly went Gervaise's little foot.

"Are you all mad, then? And will nobody tell me what it is all about?" she cried, in such an excited tone that a sergent-de-ville—passing by—thought it might be fire or murder, and dropped in to investigate the matter.

Everybody laughed again, regardless of the sergent's entrance, and Papillon, nearly suffocated, said:

"It is all yours, mademoiselle. Shop, fixtures, skins, buttons, lease, furniture—everything. The Vicomte—whom God bless for a true gentleman—has given it all to you upon your birthday."

Then ensued such a scene as you have

never beheld. Gervaise, laughing and crying by turns, kissed everybody, including the sergent-de-ville, who instantly removed his hat, and said, "*Merci, mademoiselle,*" as he bowed himself out of the door, a very much astonished man, but a Frenchman to the backbone.

Then Madame Papillon had *her* speech to deliver, which, consisting mainly of an invitation to ascend to the little *salle à manger*, and eat a dinner in Gervaise's honour, was a very great success indeed.

There had never been such a merry-making, in Papillon's time at least, in that little *salle à manger*; and when the Vicomte rose to say, that in the excitement of the moment he had omitted to mention the single condition that accompanied the gift, which was, that within a week the banns must be published for the marriage of Pitou and Gervaise, there was such a hearty response, that the very glasses on the table danced a jig for joy. But the great success of the evening was after all reserved for Papillon, when, after drinking to the health of the prospective bride, he said, with many approving nods from the wife

of his bosom, that all present were invited to a grand merry-making and dance, which he intended to give in his new *maisonette* at Auteuil, the night of Gervaise's wedding.

Everybody was sorry, down to the work-people who had been summoned to the feast at the Vicomte's request, when, rising at last, he announced that an important engagement compelled him to depart. He had no important engagement, but, even in the midst of the happiness his generous action had inspired, his thoughts remained ever pointing to the solitary woman in the Rue de Picpus; just as in storm and sunshine alike, the needle points steadily to the pole.

What he learned when he arrived at his destination, saddened him beyond measure at first.

"But, madame!" he cried, "your mother doubtless now is repentant, and sends for you to return."

"She drove me like a dog from her door," said Marie fiercely. "I am as proud as she, and yet I humbled myself to her. I fell on my knees before her and implored for mercy and forgiveness. She was implacable, and

spurned me with angry scornful words. When I rose again to my feet, I told her, in terms she could not mistake, that I should never return to her house again. Now, in a moment of repentance, which should have come long ago, she perhaps sends for me to return. It is too late ; I shall not go."

"*Et vous avez raison,*" said the Vicomte earnestly. He soon changed his mind, however. Clichette following him to the door, under the pretence of lighting the way, whispered something in his ear which gave him a shock as from a galvanic battery.

When he was in the street, he turned and surveyed the desolate old mansion.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed ; "to be alone and in this house at such a time as that ! She must be reconciled to the Countess at all hazards."

CHAPTER XIII.


CHRISTMAS-EVE.

MARIE was inflexible, however, in her resistance to every attempt at a reconciliation. The Vicomte pleaded and expostulated, and exhausted all the resources of casuistry he had at command, to no purpose, in the attempt to dissuade her from her determination. The Countess, thoroughly alarmed when the Vicomte apprised her of Marie's condition, went at once with overtures of peace to the house in the Rue de Picpus. To her intense astonishment, however, her summons at the gate remained unanswered, though the footman attested to the sound of footsteps within the garden, and the presence of a human eye, for a moment, at the keyhole.

Had the Countess been endowed with a greater degree of forecast, she might have spared herself the humiliation of this rebuff. The result had been clearly enough prefigured in the deliberate rising from bended knees, the incisive note of warning, the icy word of farewell with which that last interview terminated. It was among the inconsequent, and foolish theories that underlay her whole course of action, that pride was the natural prerogative and function of a mother; obedience, the unquestioning obligation of a child. Failing to adjust her conception of Marie's present demeanour to preconceived notions of what was dutiful and proper in a child, she continued blind to the fact of Marie's womanhood, with its necessary outcome of altered relations.

Are there not many parents, even in these days of relaxed discipline, who carry a literal enforcement of the Fifth Commandment to the verge of helotism in families, every member of which has passed the confines of that period when the years of discretion are supposed to begin?


The ties existing between mother and



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The ties existing between mother and

daughter had become sufficiently strained and tense by the former's initial act of injustice. It required but the complemental act of downright expulsion to snap them entirely asunder.

Roused to full vision when it was too late, the now distracted woman made repeated efforts to bring about a pacification. That first visit to the Rue de Picpus was the precursor of many others equally futile. She wrote repeatedly, also, but her letters were returned to her, as before, unopened.

The drear December days and the long winter nights came on apace, with leaden mornings and waning sunlight; with lustreless western skies heaped up with the grey ruin of summer sunsets and the lurid twilight, like the penumbra of an eclipse, of noonday fogs:—when the beating of rains in ceaseless monotone against the sashes of her chamber, and the shout and halloo of boisterous east winds, disturbed the rest of the weary woman; and the pendent icicles and rimy hedges, the bowing and the writhing of the gaunt trees in the teeth of the blast, and the track of the black frost, as of fire, in the

grass, accosted her gaze as she peered through the frozen panes.

There was warmth and comfort enough, in a physical sense, within, but winter had crept into the proud woman's heart, where the warmth and the glow of crackling logs could not penetrate. A void, such as death leaves, was at that gleaming fireside. Marie had never been absent before, and the widow felt the intolerable sting of her bereavement in the desolation that surrounded her. In every moan of the wind, she heard the wild despairing cry of her child; in every rattle of the sash, such possibilities of hunger and cold uprose before her, as had never found their way into her thoughts before. At every ring of the bell, she started and listened breathlessly. At the merest summons from her maid, the cold perspiration oozed from her brow. At the slightest sound—those wild east winds long tormented her—she awoke from her sleep, and with lips apart, and hearing strained to its utmost bounds, awaited a repetition of the sounds that had seemed so familiar. Again and again, in her dreams, she held her child close in her arms

once more, and awoke with a shriek to the ghastly reality.

Day by day the woman changed. Imperceptibly at first, but rapidly now, a softening, a chastening and visible influence crept into her heart, and, as heat disintegrates the hardest granite, brought her at last into full subjection. Sharper, as the days went by, grew the stings of remorse. She became more gentle. Her outbreaks of passion were more infrequent. She grew more submissive, and endured little everyday crosses with an equanimity without parallel in her previous experience.

She found a solace in the thought, and built a hope upon it, fragile as it was, that when a certain event took place, Marie's pride would melt like wax, and she then would be summoned, with penitential tears, to her darling's side. She remembered, however, and ah! how vividly! that she, younger in years than Marie now was, had fled in a moment of passion, one stormy night, from her husband's side, and had alone, and in solitude, brought her daughter into the world. And, thinking of it, a deadly fear, the out-

come of her recent experience of Marie's pride, always came upon her, that Marie, too, might in that supreme moment prove as obdurate as she then had been. But no, no; that could never be. The appalling thought was put resolutely away, and the wretched woman continued to hug to her bosom the only hope now left to her.

The Vicomte, inconsolable over his failure to turn the beautiful recusant from her purpose, grew daily more and more alarmed at the serious aspect of the case. Prevented, by obvious reasons, from continuing his visits to the Rue de Picpus, he wandered sadly about the dreary place, where so many hopes—leaden ones, be it known—now centred, and planned Quixotic things for the mitigation of the ills which on every side threatened the woman of his love.

In his calmer moods he had asked himself, of what use was this *ignis fatuus* pursuit? In what possible good to himself could it all result? That she would remain true to her marriage bond—obnoxious as it was—he never for a moment doubted; he even wished with much earnestness that it might

be so. Although there were sensuous chords in his nature, they were by no means, those from which the sweetest harmonies of his life could be evolved. Marie, in one sweep of her fingers over his heart-strings, had suggested a symphony which he felt, were he assured of its completion, would make all his remaining years melodious. Were he only assured of its completion? Yes! that was it! He felt possession of this proud but tractable beauty to be the potentially great outcome of all this widely-diffused misery. His had become the concrete phase of heart-worship, though he knew that the severance of a bond—which would melt like wax in the mere heat of a newer passion, perhaps, in others, but was unyielding steel with her—was the inexorable condition of success.

Once only during this gloomy period did he put aside the air of grave preoccupation which had now become habitual with him. This was upon the occasion of Pitou's marriage. A supplemental gift of a dinner-service elevated him, by common assent of all present at M. Papillon's that night, to a lofty niche among the beatified of earth. The *maisonette*, at

Auteuil, bright with wax-candles, resplendent with new chintz, and fairly shaking with the mad riot of the merry-making, was an agreeable enough sight to put to rout a whole brood of blue devils ; and when the Vicomte led Madame Papillon off in the first dance, and subsequently squeezed the good dame's waist in the giddiest of waltzes, there went up a stentorian shout from Papillon, that shook the chandeliers, and pitched the revelry in a broad major key that lasted to the end. For nothing in the world would D'Harmontal have marred the festival by carrying into it a solemn visage ; but when he quitted the house at midnight, in a blaze of Roman-candles which Papillon had reserved for this moment, he sighed as he caught a last glimpse of Gervaise's merry face at the open doorway, and said :

“ Ah ! if my poor Marie could be as happy as that little rosy-lipped minx ! ”

It required no assumption of levity, however, to witness the demeanour of Michaud when the sentence of the law enjoining a year's seclusion from the world of his uncomely person, was read in his presence.

“The code is defective as to penalties. It should have been ten years at least. Within eighteen months I shall find this uncomfortable creature in my path again,” muttered D’Harmontal, as he saw the green eyes disappear from the court-room.

As the days went on, and the skies grew darker, and the ground became frozen—like a beacon in the December gloom—suddenly flashed out the festival of peace and goodwill; that blessed time of good cheer and merriment, when hard hearts relax and Christian charity is rife among the peoples and sympathies are strengthened and become wider in diffusion and deeper in kind. Then, more than ever, the Vicomte thought of *her* alone in the old house of the Rue de Picpus;—alone with her misery and her freezing heart;—and, above all else, alone with the dread that darkens and fills with ghastly shadows what should be the sweetest and most tranquil of dawns—the dawn of a human life.

Christmas-eve at last! All day the clouds had been visibly gathering above the city. The winds had early scattered to

gather reinforcements. Later on, two steady currents of air blowing from opposite points of the compass, and impressing in their service all the vagrant vapours they encountered, converged upon Paris, and overweighed the zenith with rain clouds. The sky, swollen beyond its capacity, then began to descend, when suddenly into its midst leaped a wind, fresh and invigorated from gambols among arctic icebergs, and chilled to the point of congealment the impending masses.

Paris was threatened with an avalanche.

Slowly, but surely, as their density increased, the masses descended until they were pricked by the steeple-tops. Just at dusk a few flakes fell whirling, and melted upon the noses of pedestrians in the streets. The latter, looking skyward, saw what appeared like a scroll of smoke rolling over the roofs. Then the sky suddenly burst open, and a million white butterflies seemed to come fluttering through the air. Needles had, since the advent of that polar wind, been in the stinging air. In the narrow streets it had, for an hour, been roaring like a furnace. Now, sniffing and wheezing, and casting off

the falling flakes with angry snarls, it hurried away at last with a loud yelp, and the snow then fell vertically like rain.

Soon the air had become so heavy and fluffy that the smoke could not escape from the chimneys, and many a fire burned low in consequence. The street-lamps were lit, but emitting a sickly yellow light at best, they soon were blinded and dimmed by the falling particles.

The shops put on as brave a show as possible, and their Christmas illuminations flashed forth and pierced the avalanche.

The churches, too, were getting ready with lighted tapers and brimming censers for midnight masses. The great portals of Notre Dame were swept from moment to moment. High above, the great rose-window sparkled like a carbuncle. Athwart the windows of the nave the snow-flakes fell, and a dancing shadow-pattern, now of green, now of blue or gold, appeared at times in their midst, and devout people in the neighbourhood saw many a nimbused saint and seraphim abroad in the air that night.

By nine o'clock that preternatural hush,

which is the snow-storm's supremest triumph, fell upon the whole city. No longer could be heard the scouring of wheels, or the tread of horses feet. Carriages, wagons, cabs went by like phantoms, with great blotches of white upon them ;—the horses, with legs shortened to their fetlocks, floundering slowly through the drifts, and shaking, now and then, a cloud of feathery spray from their manes.

Nothing now was to be heard but the subdued hum of voices, the slamming of shop and *café* doors, the occasional jingling of bells on some market-woman's cart. Merewhisps, ordinarily lost in the roar of the great city's hurrying existence, now became stentorian.

Faster and faster fell the snow. The trees, like grand dames of an earlier period, began to shake the powder from their denuded branches. The heavens clearly were in a state of disintegration, and threatened, in falling, to drag down a real saint or two among the chimney-pots ; the sky had collapsed ; the great concavity had flattened out. Horizon and zenith were both obliterated. The stars were extinguished ; the planets that had latterly burned in the cool, frosty

depths of autumnal nights, were in ashes ; on the earth all colour had vanished ; contours of roofs and buildings had disappeared, or were merged in the prevailing whiteness. The whole city was in monochrome.

By ten o'clock the snow was knee-deep. The steeples, grown hoarse, proclaimed the hours with a dulled resonance, like the beating of muffled drums. The stillness increasing, Paris seemed at last to be in a swoon.

Then it became biting cold again ; the frozen particles became missiles, and stung the face and hands. Pedestrians began to disappear from the streets. The chestnut-women, whose little stoves with their ruddy gleam had thus far presented a brave and cheerful front to the storm, succumbed at last. The *cafés* still held out.

There were people—for the most part women—who crept to the churches. Others, equally devout—and they were in the majority—stayed at home, and, watching the storm at intervals through the frosty panes, thought with a shudder of belated travellers, of shipwrecked mariners, of the people who sat by desolate hearthstones.

At eleven the wind returned, fresh from a foray seaward, and leaping into the snow, as a strong man dashes into booming breakers, lashed it into whirls of tingling particles, which flew beating and tapping at all the windows.

The strokes of eleven had come from St. Sulpice's tower with an uneven sound ; the first loud, the second low, the third inaudible ; the last note breaking forth like the shout of a man who feels a sudden grip at his throat.

The Countess de Rauville heard it. She had been pacing the floor for hours. She could not rest, she could not sit ; the whole house was full of shrieks. She heard an uncanny noise, as of the peck of spectre birds at the casements. Visible through the frosty panes were only the eddying of snow-flakes, and the wild gesticulations of the trees as they rocked in the gale.

"Eleven o'clock," said she, verifying St. Sulpice by her watch.

But hark ! was that the snort of a horse ? Was that dull, scouring sound the scraping of wheels in the court ? Could that be the

stamp of a man in the act of shaking off some clinging impediment?

A ring at the bell!

"Good God! see what it is!" cries the Countess to her maid.

She is deathly pale. Her heart stands still; she has but a moment to wait, but such a moment! such an unutterably long moment!

"A cabman! A letter!"

She almost sinks to the ground.

"Quick, then! a candle! It must be from *her*—but no—no—this is not her writing. Great heavens! what is this?

"Come quickly, madame, for the love of God! Madame de Laferrière is dying; and I am alone, and distracted.

"CLICHETTE."

What a cry shivers through the house! even the servants in the kitchen hear it, and turn pale.

"Quick! a shawl! a bonnet! anything! Stupid—dolt! can you not hurry?"

To fly down the staircase, and into the court is the question of a moment.

"A bad night this, madame," says cabby, buttoning his cloak up to his chin.

"Yes! yes! Never mind the night, only hasten back to whence you came. You shall have all the money you want. Kill your horse, if needs be; you shall have a better. On, now—on!—but stop! drive first to Dr. Liancourt's, Rue St. Honoré. No. 75!"

Over the river, so madly swirling against the abutments of the bridge, and inky black by contrast with the surrounding whiteness.

"Faster! faster! faster!"

A crazy woman rattling the cab window and shouting thus; loud cracks of a whip; a black horse floundering, with steaming flanks, through heaped-up drifts.

"Thank Heaven! he is at home."

The red light of the cab falls upon the physician's face. He shades his eyes with his hand, and peers anxiously into the storm. A wild—despairing face appears at the window.

"'Tis I, monsieur—Madame de Rauville. My daughter is dying, and you must come."

Vacillation at an end, he shortly reappears and enters the cab.

Onward now—faster! faster, good cabby! with shouts, with loud cracking of the whip, with snow streaming like a mane from the wheels' peripheries.

"Gloria in Excelsis" bursts from the open doorway of a church, and a muffled boom of bells answers back from the steeple-top. It is Christmas morning at last. The Rue St. Antoine is full of late revellers. A mis-directed snowball falls with a thud upon the roof of the cab. The Place du Trône—a great white plain with its two columns. The Rue de Picpus!—slowly now—we are here at last.

Cabby receives more gold than he has ever seen at one time in his life, upon the condition of his remaining here at the gate, in case of further need.

And now a strange thing occurs—Clichette bars the way to the staircase; she is very pale, but determined.

"Where is she? For mercy's sake, where is my child? What! *What!* Cannot see her! the doctor says so! M. Liancourt, do

you hear what this poor fool says—that I cannot see my own daughter !”

“ Yield, madame ; the doctor doubtless has good reasons. We shall see, however ; go into that room, I shall return in a minute.”

A small, low-ceiled room upon the ground-floor ; a heap of old lumber in a corner ; a broken window, through which the wind wails like the minor stop of a cathedral organ ; a snow-drift half-way across the floor ; a single candle in a rusty sconce ; a fireplace filled with the débris of the crumbling chimney.

Good God ! what a marrow-freezing shriek ! and, shuddering, the Countess begins to pace the floor. A minute passes—it is a year ; five minutes—an eternity. Then comes another scream, drowned in the howl of the blast, and a wild tattoo of driving sleet against the broken panes.

Thank Heaven ! the doctor at last.

“ Now, then, let me go !”

“ Impossible as yet, madame.”

The doctor is very grave.

“ Why, then, in the name of all that is compassionate ? What do you mean ?”

"Your daughter is in great danger, madame."

The Countess shudders; she lowers her voice.

"Will she live. Oh! doctor, will she live?"

"I hope so. I cannot yet tell. The doctor that preceded me has done all he could. You can rely on my doing my very best."

"I must go, don't stand in my way. I will go, I tell you!"

They stand in the passage. He lays his hand upon the railing of the stairs.

"Madame, you cannot pass. She is delirious, and from words she utters, your presence now would certainly prove disastrous."

"Don't say that! I am her mother, monsieur. My place should be by her side. Oh! I am not afraid of your looks. Let me pass, I tell you. There! there!" covering her ears with her hand, "do you hear that scream? Let me go, she will die without me. I brought her into the world, M. Liancourt; it was a cold night, too, and I was alone like

her. There !” [another scream !] “ Oh ! let me go ! please ! please ! please let me go !”

The doctor is inflexible ; he shakes his head, and gently pushes her into the room again.

“ Patience and courage, madame ; it will soon be over,” he whispers, as he closes the door behind him.

Half an hour passes—an hour—then he returns. His face wears a more hopeful look.

“ Madame, her life is safe for the present. She has a daughter ; it is alive and well.”

A wan smile appears upon the Countess’s lips.

“ Thank God,” she murmurs. “ And now, my good doctor, I must go to her at once. Have I not been very patient ?” and she smiles again.

The doctor’s rigid features soften, for one instant, before that appealing look, and then harden again. Nature had given him a heart as impressible as India-rubber, his art had vulcanised it into a flint.

“ Madame,” he says, “ I regret the necessity of appearing unkind, but since you have con-

fided your daughter to my care, I am responsible for her life. The charge is a weighty one; *under the circumstances*"—and he looks the Countess steadily in the eyes—"a very weighty one; and for both your sakes, I cannot permit you to see her at present. Now that the crisis has passed, let me urge you to return to your home. By further exposure to the temperature of this miserable house, you will simply endanger your own health. Come, madame, be reasonable, and let me escort you to the cab."

She has listened with consternation to his words. For a single instant her jaw droops, and the pupils of her eyes expand with amazement. Then she sets her teeth, and springs at him like a panther at bay.

"What!" she shrieks, "do you still *dare* bar the way to my child?"

"Yes, madame. It is my duty to dare anything that would place the life of your child in needless jeopardy; and since you force me to speak plainly, let me ask, Madame la Comtesse, why your daughter is here? This house is no fit place for such an event

as has just occurred. The world, madame, says strange things of your cruelty, and I am much afraid that your solicitude has come many days too late."

The words cut her to the quick; her resentment quickly dies out. She covers her face with her hands, and bursts into tears.

"I know—I know!" she sobs. "I have been very unfeeling and cruel, I admit it all. But she will forgive me, I know. Look at me, my good doctor—look at these tears; they say much, for I seldom weep, monsieur. Tell her that I am proud no longer. Go tell her so, and I am sure she will see me then. Go—go, my good doctor!"

Neither tears nor entreaties can shake his decision, however. The Countess, suddenly developing an equal contumacy, refuses to leave the house; and heedless of the cold, the bitter draught, the voice of the tempest sinking, at last, into a mere querulous hum, she paces the floor of the miserable room, until physical endurance giving way, she consents to be led to the cab, and is driven in the icy dawn to her home.

The storm has expended its last breath. The sheen of the snow arises to meet the advancing day. The whole city shines resplendent as in a coat of silver mail. Like a bride adorned, it awaits the greeting of the Christmas morn.

The Countess lay all that day in a burning fever. At noon, as the cannon upon the Esplanade of the Invalides thundered a *Te Deum* over the fall of Antwerp, the doctor came with reassuring tidings from Marie.

When he returned at night, the poor woman was delirious. He shook his head gravely.

"She *may* recover," he said, "but she will be unable to leave her room for many—many weeks."

CHAPTER XIV

"LASCIATE OGNI SPERANZA."

THE doctor's predictions were fully verified. The Countess lay for two weeks upon the bare edge of eternity. Out from the incoherencies of her delirium, one pitiful cry had gone up by day and night, and at times strong hands were required to hold her in bed.

"Snow!" she would exclaim, trying to shake them off, "what do I care if it does snow! what do I care if it covers the roofs! Call the cabman—I must go and see my daughter!"

In her first lucid moments, when the crisis of the fever had passed, she caught hold of the doctor's hand and asked :

"Is she alive?"

"Yes, and well," he answered.

A smile crept into her poor wan face as she turned it up to his and said :

"You will bring her and the baby to me as quickly as you can, will you not, my good doctor?"

"As quickly as I can, madame," he said gently.

And with this soothing assurance, she turned contentedly upon her pillow and dropped off into a quiet sleep.

In spite of all her ghostly surroundings and discomforts, with the old house shrieking at night like a cracked organ in the sweep of wild December gales, and filling her very chamber with icy draughts, Marie made such rapid strides toward recovery, that in fourteen days from her confinement—in other words, upon the 8th of January—she was able to walk about the room, and, indeed, replied through the window to a salutation from D'Harmental in the garden below.

The latter, who had called morning and evening to learn of the invalid's progress, was delighted at this visible token of her recovery.

"In three days from now," whispered Clichette at the door, "the nurse says that you may see her."

"Did she really?"

The little man seemed suddenly to expand and grow tall. His spirits were in *apogee*; he gave Clichette a louis d'or upon the spot, and as he walked down the Rue de Picpus, he could not help thinking that he had never seen sunshine quite as bright as on this particular morning. Three days! It was an eternity, but there was something worth waiting for at the end.

He felt that he had lived the twenty-three years of his life to some purpose, when he walked down the now familiar street on the morning of the 11th. He entered the garden briskly, and gave a single pull at the bell. He heard its noisy clangour in the passage, threw open his *paletot*, and stood a minute fingering the seals of his watch-chain. But a second or two had ordinarily elapsed before he heard the answering pit-pat of Clichette's feet, and the grate of the key in the lock; now a full minute passed, and there was no response.

He smiled.

"That was too mild a pull for such a house as this," he said, with a jerk at the bell that awoke a perfect babel of echoes within.

Another interval of silence—an almost interminable one—followed.

A look of perplexity crept slowly into his face; he stopped twiddling his watch-chain, and stepping back a few feet from the threshold, looked earnestly up at the windows. There they were, lofty, partly curtained, broken in places, a shimmer of light where the sun fell slantwise upon the panes, an impenetrable void beyond.

"Curious! very curious, this!" he muttered, as he advanced and gave the bell such a pull that a perfect scream of tintinabulation burst from the broken windows.

A still longer interval of silence followed.

"Well! *que le diable m'emporte*, if I understand this!" he said, shrugging his shoulders, and looking around as if in search of somebody who *did* understand it.

He peered through the windows of the lower rooms, and saw excoriated walls, heaped-

up rubbish, and much more of the melancholy detritus of decay. Then he walked down to the gate, and surveyed the upper windows once more on tiptoe, and at last leaned against the wall in despair.

At that moment a squeaky voice came as from the clouds.

"Who are you looking for? the lady?"

"*Dame!* yes; where is she?" he answered, with a look skyward.

"Well! she has gone away!" said the voice.

By this time he descried a little, old shrivelled head in a white cap, projecting from a window in the adjoining house.

"Gone away!" he repeated under his breath, as Poe might have answered the croak of his raven.

"In a carriage—a *fiacre*—a shut-up one. Yes. Three of them; one with a long white thing like a baby in her arms."

"When did they go?"

"At eight this morning."

"In what direction, then?"

"That way," pointing toward the Place du Trône.

"You are quite sure of all this, are you, *ma vieille*?"

"*Écoutez moi*, monsieur, you just go back and keep pulling at that bell until you satisfy yourself of the truth of what civil people tell you."

Slam went the window, and at the same moment something seemed to slam to in his heart.

"What a disgusting old woman!" he said, half aloud. Then he went out at the gate, and looked up and down the street with the forlornest and most miserable face imaginable.

"She couldn't have been spirited away, there were too many of them for that," was his reflection, as, with an air of the profoundest dejection, he retraced his steps to the Boulevards.

An hour afterward he brightened up with a sudden idea, and calling a *fiacre*, drove to the Rue de Varennes.

The porter at the gate of the Hôtel de Rauville was always glad to see the Vicomte. He had, in fact, a nebulous impression that D'Harmental was connected with the Mint—

an idea borne out, in some measure, by the latter's unfailing generosity and the lustre of his louis d'or.

"Gobou" (that was his name), "how is the Countess this morning?" the Vicomte asked, when he had dismissed the *fiacre*.

"Much better, Monsieur le Vicomte, much better. Thank God, the danger now is over."

"She has been very ill, Gobou?"

"Sadly so, M. le Vicomte. You see it was mostly in her head;" here, after looking around him, he dropped his voice to a confidential whisper: "Up in a balloon, as it were, all the time. It appeared to be snowing, most time, where her poor head had got to up there; and the way she cried for mademoiselle, they say, would have brought tears to the eyes of a marble statue."

"Ah! yes! if mademoiselle would only return," said the Vicomte reflectively.

"There would then be no further need of medicine; that is what we all say, M. le Vicomte."

"Does the doctor still come twice a day?"

"Once only now, M. le Vicomte."

"He has been here this morning?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Any other visitors this morning?"

"No, monsieur."

"You are quite sure of this?"

"Positive, monsieur."

With something very much like a sigh the Vicomte put a coin into Gobou's hand and turned away. He had walked a few steps, when he stopped and came back.

"If mademoiselle *had* returned you would know it, of course, eh, Gobou?" he asked.

"Certainly, M. le Vicomte."

"She could not enter by the Rue] Barbet de Jouy?"

"No, M. le Vicomte; the door of the pavilion has been boarded up ever since——"

"Yes! yes! thank you, Gobou," and the Vicomte now walked off in earnest.

Entering his hôtel in the Rue Vanneau, a few minutes later, in a state of mind approaching distraction, his first act was to ring the bell violently.

Bernard appeared.

"Any letters for me, Bernard?"

"One, M. le Vicomte."

"Dolt! give it to me, quick!"

He tore open a delicately-scented missive with Mademoiselle Lutin's name in an almost undecipherable scrawl at the bottom. It was brimful of reproaches. She had been ill, and had lost her engagement at the Grand Opera, and was duly hysterical over the fact.

"Hang the girl!" he said, dashing the letter into the grate; "still, she mustn't suffer," he added reflectively, taking a bank-note for five hundred francs from his pocket, and seizing a pen: "There," he said, reading aloud:

"DEAR LUTIN,

"I am sorry you caught that chill. Buy a thicker shawl when you get well. I enclose a prescription for you."

That is better than a whole reamful of rhapsody, eh, Bernard?"

Bernard assented with a grin, and stood, pending further orders, a much-interested spectator of the Vicomte's movements.

When the note was sealed and directed, D'Harmontal looked up and said :

"Come, Bernard, you are sure there are no more letters."

"Quite sure, M. le Vicomte. Oh yes! *quite* sure," and Bernard smiled sweetly. Then his jaw dropped, and a transformation-scene took place in his features. "Oh! Eh! Lord bless us!"

The Vicomte leaped to his feet.

"So your skull is as full of sawdust as ever, is it?" he said. "Come, come, where is it?"

Bernard approached the mantel, and with much humility presented his master with another letter.

Little need to tell from whom *this* had come.

A cry of joy burst from his lips as he tore it open.

"DEAR VICOMTE,

"I have left the Rue de Picpus. Come and see me at the Cheval Blanc, Passy.

"MARIE DE LAFERRIÈRE."



The Vicomte turned and glared at the unhappy Bernard.

"You—you—you——" he roared, unable to adjust any satisfactory objurgatory missile to his tongue's-end.

"Yes," said Bernard meekly ; " yes, M. le Vicomte, I know it."

" Here, then ; help me on with this coat, and run for your life, and tell the coachman to have the greys at the door in ten minutes. Do you hear ?"

" Yes ! yes !" answered Bernard, with a lateral swing of his coat-tails through the door.

Down the Quai d'Orsay, over the Pont de Jena at a full trot, and up, breathlessly, to the Barrière. It all seemed the work of a minute. A brief confabulation as to the whereabouts of the "Cheval Blanc," and off again with a low, whisking noise of wheels, then up with a broad sweep to the entrance of the inn.

The landlord came plunging, like a Jack-in-the-box, from the door, and stood hatless in the wind until the Vicomte descended.

" Was Madame de Laferrière stopping at the Cheval Blanc ?"

"Most assuredly; the Cheval Blanc was honoured by her presence at this very moment."

The Vicomte, extending his card, desired that madame should be made acquainted with his arrival. With an accompaniment of many bows he was at once shown by the landlord into a cheerful little salon, and a copy of *La France Pittoresque*, as a suitable beguilement of the minutes during which he would be obliged to wait, was placed in his hands. Indisposed at that moment even for that tepid form of literary distraction, he stepped to the window, and, with his back to the door, gazed listlessly into the courtyard of the inn.

Suddenly a delicate aroma, as of violets, and the low "*frou-frou*" of a woman's robe accosted his senses in turn, and, starting round, he found Marie de Laferrière at his side.

She was but little altered. To a superficial observer there was change in neither form nor feature. There was now a pellucidness and a depth to her pallor that partook more of the nature of wax than of marble, and her face was certainly thinner, though scarcely

noticeable, through the absence of any bony angularities and projections. To the Vicomte's mind she had never appeared more charming.

When the first salutations were over, D'Harmontal, with a timidity quite unnatural to him, said :

"I—I am fond of little girls. Do let me see it?"

Her white teeth gleamed a moment in the midst of a smile doubly delightful, on account of its rarity, to behold ; and soon there appeared upon the scene a little blinking creature, who looked cross-eyed at the Vicomte, and doubled up its fists at him, and sneezed, and spat, and made itself generally obnoxious. Then the nurse, a fussy, much-beribboned and becaped woman of forty, insisted upon the Vicomte's taking the mite in his arms.

"It's dreadfully small," he said, evidently afraid of breaking or crushing it, as he lifted it up, "and a trifling—er—er—rosy. I never saw one before. It's extremely interesting, though, upon my word it is," etc., etc., etc., *ad nauseam*.

When this was all over with, and he had clucked, and ti-ti, and ta-taed himself quite out of breath, the mite was transferred, with the care usually bestowed upon the handling of a bit of egg-shell china, to the nurse's arms again, and Marie and the Vicomte were alone.

"Monsieur d'Harmontal," she said, first breaking silence, "I sent for you upon important business—important, at least, in so far as I am concerned ;" and she gave him a look that was simply divine.

He assumed a look of gravity at once.

"To-night," she added, "I start for England. In three days I shall be there."

"For England !" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Where I propose to fix my future residence,—yes."

"Do you intend, then, to abandon your native country, madame ?"

"Yes, monsieur, and my child as well."

"And your child as well !"

"Yes, M. le Vicomte. As I now feel, with the memory of what its father has brought upon me still festering in my mind, I cannot

love it as I should. The time may come, and doubtless will come, when I can do better. The sight of it now recalls, as nothing else could recall, the hopeless and helpless misery of my wretched lot."

"Madame, let me entreat you to reconsider your decision," said the Vicomte earnestly.

"My decision, monsieur, is an unalterable one; do not seek to dissuade me from it; it will be of no avail, and I shall be compelled to appear obdurate and ungrateful to one who has been kinder than a brother to me."

The Vicomte's countenance fell, and as he did not at once reply, she continued :

"But for your goodness to me, Vicomte, I should have gone away without exchanging a word of farewell with anybody. I felt, however, that I should be sadly wanting in gratitude were I not to confide to you my intentions, and express my heartfelt acknowledgment of all your kindly offices. I should perhaps have rested at this. My wretched affairs have caused you sufficient annoyance as it is——"

"Say anything but that, I beseech you," he interposed warmly.

"It is my conviction, nevertheless, monsieur; but, as it would appear that our heaviest burdens are imposed upon those we most esteem, I have decided, in the face of all my present obligation, to inflict upon you a new and two-fold responsibility, namely, the maintenance of my secret, and the guardianship of my child."

The Vicomte pushed back his chair, drew a long breath, and looked at her without saying a word; unexpected paralysis of the Harmontal tongue having taken place.

"The child," she continued, "will remain with its present nurse until it is five years old. Ample provision has already been made for its support by me, until that period. She will then be put in your charge, with the understanding that you are to place her at once in the convent of the Sacred Heart, there to remain until her twelfth birthday, when you are to break the seal of this packet for further instructions."

Whereupon she took a sealed document from her pocket, and placed it in his hands. He received it in speechless amazement. Gervaise had not been more dumbfounded

at the receipt of her birthday deed, than was D'Harmontal, as he examined the notarial seal, and read upon the envelope :

“ To be opened by the Vicomte d'Harmontal or his executor, on the 22nd of December, 1844.”

Mechanically, like one in a dream, he placed it in his pocket.

“ You consent then ?” she said, as a slight flush mounted to her temples.

“ *Parbleu !* yes—but——”

“ But what ?”

“ Don't go—don't leave England—I entreat you, don't.

The mistiness of the dream quickly vanished, and he saw but the grim reality of her leaving *him*.

A presentiment of what was coming flashed through her mind.

“ Do not grieve me by further entreaty, Vicomte,” she said : “ I leave Passy by the diligence, at five o'clock. On Saturday I sail from Calais.”

“ But madame, your mother ! your poor mother !”

“ She is much better, and will soon re-

cover ; were it otherwise, I should remain in France."

"Is your heart then so hardened against her."

"Yes, as hers has been against me."

"But she repented!"

"When it was too late, monsieur."

He saw that further expostulation was useless, but a whole volume of entreaty was legible in his eyes as he looked in her face, and asked :

"And what, in a strange country, and alone, will you do, madame?"

"I have realised a considerable sum from the sale of my jewels," she answered ; "that will suffice for a time, and when it is exhausted—*eh bien* I cannot say. I know not yet the marketable value in England of what poor accomplishments I chance to possess."

"Madame ! of what are you speaking ?" cried the Vicomte, starting up with a burning face. "I did not mean that ; you certainly have no intention of remaining abroad ?"

"For ever, possibly, yes," she answered in a tone that left no room for doubt.

The Vicomte, in his despair, now forgot himself. He seized her hand. The long-pent-up passion burst its bounds.

"Marie," he cried piteously, "do not go. Do not go."

"M. le Vicomte, you forget yourself; you are too much of a gentleman to take advantage of my position. Remember that I am a married woman," she said, not unkindly or harshly, and in a very low tone.

"In the eyes of Heaven you are not."

"But according to that which is infinitely more exacting and inexorable, a law of man's devising, I am the wife of another."

"What are laws, whether human or divine, to a man in love!" he cried with sudden recklessness; then dropping his voice to a mere whisper, he said :

"Marie."

"Don't, please don't; this is wicked," she faltered.

"But a single word. There *are* laws, as you say, which we must all respect; but if the time *should* come——"

"It may never come, please release my hand."

"I have patience; I am young; I can wait a long time—a lifetime if needs be."

"You forget the Marquis de Laferrière,"

she said, lowering her eyes before his ardent gaze.

"He will soon cease to be an obstacle. He is to be married in February to a certain Mdle. de Campvallon."

She turned white again, bit her lips, and stood a moment as rigid as marble. Then the Vicomte relinquished her hand, and she sank into a chair ; neither spoke for a time.

"He could have cared but little for me after all," she said at length with great bitterness.

Rehabilitation of the Marquis's character was not at this moment the mission of D'Harmontal. He maintained a discreet silence, and awaited her next words with much curiosity. The result was creditable to his perspicacity.

"You have been very good to me, Vicomte," she said, suddenly looking up into his face. "Better than anybody else in the whole world."

He shrugged his shoulders by way of a disclaimer of so much merit, then fairly bounded from his chair, as she spoke again, and said :

"You deserve the love of a good woman, Vicomte."

He had her by the hand again in an instant.

"You are that woman," he said eagerly.

"No, I am not," she answered sadly. "I do not deserve the sympathy you have shown for me. I have by no means expiated my folly and my wickedness. My lot may be a hard one, but I have brought it entirely upon myself. I am not doing right at this moment even; I should not abandon my child. I know it well, but I do not love her as I should; this is because I detest the father;—which is no excuse after all, for the child is innocent, and I am wicked, very wicked. But *you* will be good to her, I am sure of that; and perhaps, by-and-by, I shall want to see her again—oh yes, I shall surely some day want to see her again—and then——"

"And then, my poor Marie, if you can you will give me the right to call her my child too. Ah! do not dishearten me! I can wait five—ten—*fifty* years if necessary. Only tell me to wait and hope."

"Vicomte, you are as stupid as you are good," she answered, with a grateful look. "Were you to insist upon waiting a hundred years, it is not within my power to prevent your committing such a folly."

"But may I hope?" he pleaded. "Just say to me, 'Charles wait and hope'—those three words only."

She smiled sadly, and shook her head.

"I am sorry for this," she said. "It would seem that I, who would do anything in the world to repay the debt of gratitude I owe you, am destined only to make you miserable."

"You will make me very happy if you will do as I wish," he rejoined with great earnestness.

"To repeat those foolish words? Is that what you exact of me, then?"

"I exact nothing, Marie—I beg and implore. The words are harmless ones. It can be no sin for you to utter them. If you feel, however, that it would be wrong, I will no longer urge you."

She smiled again.

"You are very persistent. Must I really call you Charles as well?"

"Certainly."

"Well then, my good and dear friend Charles, wait and hope, if you will; and when you are weary and discouraged, as you will

surely be, at least think kindly of one who will ever keep your memory green in her heart."

Five minutes later, the Vicomte abruptly asked :

"What is to be the name of the little one?"

"Fifine!" at this moment cried a voice in the passage.

Marie and the Vicomte looked at each other, as if by a common impulse.

"Fifine is a pretty name, though it is a plebeian one," said she at last.

"It came as from the clouds, it must be Fifine;" and so it was decided.

He accompanied her as far as Calais. Her first letter was dated from London, and spoke hopefully of the future. The Countess recovered rapidly, and was able to go out the last week in January. Her first visit was to the house in the Rue de Picpus. She found it empty and deserted. The shock produced by the discovery was awful. The Vicomte, when questioned, admitted that he knew where Marie was, and promised tidings of her from time to time ; but, true to his compact, no amount

of pleading or cajolery could extort from him the place of her abode.

In February the Marquis was married to Mdle. de Campvallon. By some strange irony, unintentional let us hope, the Countess received an invitation to the wedding. Henri de Laferrière had received the second instalment of his forty thousand francs at New York. Pitou, under Gervaise's instructions, began to make wonderful proficiency in the art of glove-making. Mdle. Lutin recovered from her illness by the aid of another prescription, and, at the suggestion of the Vicomte, obtained a new lover. Later on in June, Papillon had the honour of exhibiting a mammoth strawberry of his own raising, and bearing his name, in the window of the Café Anglais. In the *Causerie* of the *Journal des Débats* it was described as unprecedented in size, and worthy of the renown of the grower. A copy of the paper was put away in lavender as an inestimable family treasure. Fifine thrived wonderfully with her nurse, and if much vigorous crowing signified anything at all, it must have meant that she cordially approved of her mamma's choice of guardian.

In June, the Hôtel de Rauville suddenly became empty; the Countess had gone, nobody, with the exception of the Vicomte d'Harmontal, could tell whither; and for a time, busy surmises filled the air.

In this wise, so far as the characters of our story are concerned, the spring and the summer of the year 1833 passed away.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

OUR LADY OF THE CLIFF.

SAINT LOUP is unknown to the modern tourist. The great stream of travel roars and shrieks through Seine valley not far away, and passengers by the express train from Dieppe to Paris may discern, by diligent search in the horizon, a spire thrust like a thumb above a low range of hills just beyond Rouen. This spire belongs to the church of Saint Loup; and to the stone effigy of Our Lady at its summit, is deputed the office of watching the progress of civilisation beyond the hills. Except by the post-road, the

village is, in fact, an inaccessible one, and is rather proud than otherwise of its insulation. With whatever interest the marble woman, from her secure point of espial upon the steeple-top, may have watched the progress of the first locomotive engine as it toiled with infinite smoke and sputter toward Rouen, Saint Loup, at least, exempt from all such cunning devices of the *dévil*, cared not a straw that a new era in human progress was then dawning. Later on, when railroads came in vogue, there was a perceptible diminution of travel upon the post-road; there was less bustle about the village auberge, and fewer relays of horses were from time to time required; but except to the innkeeper, this was no source of inquietude. Saint Loup, to its inhabitants, revolved upon its own axis, had an unescheatable interest in sun, moon and stars, and lived, thanks to Our Lady of the Cliff, upon the best of terms with Omnipotence.

Our story has now to do with the year 1848.

That year there was a total eclipse of Orleanism in France. Bonfires of gilded and

satin furniture blazed right merrily one February morning in the gardens of the Tuileries, and a royal patronymic assumed the strange guise of Smith, while peripatetic majesty was wending his way Britainward. Storm-bells pealed through the length and breadth of Europe. Every wind was tuned to the key of the "Marseillaise." The cause of human liberty was in the air, and fairly respirable. Artillerymen with lighted matches stood at many a palace-gate. But though guns bellowed, and biting grape-shot stilled many a brave heart, and royal ensigns flew in the end triumphant, it was found when the smoke had cleared away, that appreciable inroads had everywhere been made upon the pretensions of the "Lord's anointed."

But Saint Loup knew nothing of this, and cared still less. The grass in the spring pushed, shivering, through the snow, and chaperoned the violets into the light. The sap mounted gleefully into the trees, and thrust forth a flood of blossoms to travesty the snow; the fruit found a lover in the sun, and ripened with his ardent wooing; the roses made the air drowsy with their breath,

and sent the bees staggering with sweet booty to heaped-up honey-cells ; the stars beamed at night and paled in the dawn ; the moon full and quartered ; the rain rained, and wild easterly gales boomed against the hills as waves beat against a breakwater ; every morning at sunrise the bell, tinkling in the clouds, called to early mass ; a few black crosses were added to the demure little churchyard. In vain would it have been at Saint Loup to ask for a knowledge of more than this in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty-eight. The events of 1830 were still in course of slow deglutition in the village consciousness. Inability to digest the mystery of Orleanism produced subsequent nightmare ; but with that we have nothing to do.

Saint Loup was a typographical eccentricity. It lay sprawling, as it were ; a house here, a cottage there, with wide-intervening gardens half-way down a deep depression or valley, open to the south, but walled in on the east by a range of lofty hills ; a tiny stream—that brawled with a clinking and swirling of pebbles in the summer, and fumed and

fretted and roared with the breaking-up of winterice—to the left, with glimpses of meadowland and another range of hills beyond ; and a great brown rock, ankle-deep in cottages and apple-orchards, standing like a barred and bolted gate against any possible irruption of fierce north winds, and bearing high upon its crest the church of Our Lady. There was, indeed, the usual village street, hideous in stuccoed houses of a saffron hue, with red-tiled and argus-eyed roofs, and lorded over by a brick and plaster conjunction of mairie and school-house at its northern extremity. Here, too, was the *épicerie*, the *café*, the *marchand des tabacs*, and its complemental feature, a fountain, which, like the tongue of a harridan, never ceased running. Village streets usually form a fractional part of public highways. This was exceptional in this respect. The high-road girdling the eastern hills, and flecked at noonday by the shadows of trim young poplars, made but a single deviation from its course, and that was in the direction of the village inn, which lay so far above the village street that the latter appeared to be in a grassy ditch.

Saint Loup was one of the sun's favourite loitering places; there he was most prodigal of his gold, whence it came about that many a barge floated down Seine water heaped up with succulent treasure for far-off grimy Covent Garden market. The flowers failed not to profit by the sun's beneficence, and there were times when the air of Saint Loup was so filled with their fragrance, that the church of Our Lady had little need of smoking censers; and thus, in its own sweet way, the fruitful valley became a worshipper, and said its orisons through the mouth of its flowers.

It is doubtful if Father Joseph, in the whole course of his twenty years' ministrations at the shrine of Our Lady, had once thought of this act of presumption upon the part of the valley. If the idea had been suggested to him, he would probably, after due consultation with the Fathers of the Church, have condemned the flowers as heretical in departing from established formulas.

No shadow of such a thought, however, could have fallen upon the lives of our simple village-folk, to whom the oracular wisdom of

Father Joseph was as impressive as the personages of nature. They admired the flowers, and valued, for commercial reasons, the sunshine; but they found supreme beauty and supreme beneficence in neither. They admired their church, and justly so, for no more beautiful, though inarticulate legend of the wonderful *ancien régime* existed in all sunny France. Did not the King send a learned man—a man steeped and dripping over with human lore, it was breathlessly whispered—who came and sketched the brave old church with its pinnacles and buttresses, its gargoyles and griffins, and omitted not even Our Lady herself high up among the twinkling stars? who dug about its foundations and furbished up its old tombs, and dragged astonishing secrets out of its musty crypts? And did not a wonderful book, telling how and by whom the old church had been built, and how, traced upon its walls, were chronicles of things, until then, unknown of men—did not this surprising book come from the King's own secretary, with the name of Pierre Lupin, the *maire*, written in never so brave letters upon the fly-leaf?—a book even now to

be seen and approached with reverence as it lies on a velvet cushion in Le Sieur Lupin's little parlour?

Most assuredly we answer, adding, that this love for the old and the beautiful would appear such an admirable trait of character, as to inspire great hopes of the intelligence of these good villagers. Alas! gauged by the perception of a Roman peasant, is not the very dome of St. Peter's dwarfed by the presence of the black Mumbo Jumbo below, whose big toe has been, by the same token, long since reverentially kissed away!

Beneath the high altar of the church of Our Lady, in a silver casket, were two commonplace enough objects.

One was a tooth—a simple bicuspid in an excellent state of preservation. The other was a nail, perfectly scrofulous with rust, and an undreamed-of relic—being no less than a genuine nail from the Cross.

The tooth had belonged to John the Baptist, and it was believed, despite of the solemn wagging of Father Joseph's head, that upon every fête-day of the Saint it exhaled a vague odour of locusts and wild

honey : and though the church might be, and indeed was, very beautiful, with stained glass, and nimbused saints, and many-hoed seraphim, and Our Lady in marble, so pure and white, whose presence pervaded the holy place as with a benediction—relics such as these were, to the village mind, the true talismans against evil. While they remained in the sanctuary, storms might rage, frenzied above the little valley, pestilence might sweep through the land, and bivouac-fires gleam from every other hill-top in a desolated France ; yet would the church on the Cliff, by virtue of these relics, remain a sturdy rampart, against which the power of evil would surely be broken.

This confidence in the occult virtues of a tooth was in fact the key-note of the village intelligence. Devout to fanaticism ; venerating the memory of every saint in the calendar ; firm believers in the personality and sulphurous attributes of the devil, and in the efficacy of magic powders and old women's prayers in warding off sickness and misfortune, these good villagers heard the cattle talking together on Christmas nights, never failed in

the observance of the rogations in the May-time, and had lived on thus from generation to generation, disturbed by no modern innovations; reading coarse print, perhaps, at times, and despising it if the truth were known; contented with their lot, grateful for such small blessings as were vouchsafed to them by Our Lady of the Cliff, perplexed only by the mystery of life and death, in so far as related, first, to the care of little children who grew up in the shadow of the Cliff among the roses, and imbibed with their mothers' milk that unfaltering faith which sees omnipotence in dead men's teeth; and finally, to the grim requirements of funeral masses, and a black cross in the village churchyard when the business and cares of life were all well over.

Among such people the flowers would have bloomed unnoticed and uncared for, perhaps, had there not been one in the village who loved them for their own sakes and the sunshine too. This was Fifine, a little girl. The whole village was agreed in this, however, as in no other thing, excepting in the matter of the relics, that no flower could

surpass her in the freshness and purity of her young beauty, that no sunshine could be warmer than her affection, brighter than her joyous bird-like nature. Indeed, she seemed half bird, half flower, and might, in fairyland, have been born of the love of humming-bird and rose. As little amenable to human laws was she, as either would have been. She saw impressive things in the old church. She loved to place violets in the cold white hands of the virgin, for her worship was instinctive in this direction. She had, to her knowledge, no earthly mother, and her childish affections were poured in a vague trustful way at the feet of this marble woman, whom Father Joseph assured her was next to God, and the mother of all mankind. Her religion was that of an untutored child's, a blending of pagan myths and sweetest Christian truths, and faith in the eternity of all that is good and beautiful in the world. Whereat Father Joseph's orthodox soul was greatly vexed. His good seeds of doctrine so carefully sown in this fresh young heart should have borne excellent fruit. Alas! there only sprang up a tangle of wild flowers,

fragrant if you will, but full of heretical poison.

"Tell me, Father Joseph," she had said upon one occasion, "do birds and flowers have souls?"

"Why, my little one?" he had replied meditatively, as if he had not been surprised at the question, and were searching among the dry husks of doctrine for a suitable reply.

"Because," she had answered with a triumphant toss of her golden head, "if purgatory were to be filled with heliotrope and jasmine, and my robin could be with me to say 'Good-morning, Fifine,' I should not mind going there one bit."

This Fifine, who had she lived in Venice would have had all the pigeons of St. Mark trotting at her heels, was Saint Loup's fairy queen. For her cottage doors flew open wide. Children shouted when her straw hat appeared above the hedgerows. There was strife and contention among all the feathered tribes in the valley as to who should first peck at her hands in the morning. For her the dogs even had a special wag of the tail. The doctor plucked the ripest peaches from

his garden wall and gave her the *gruë* filled her pockets with bonbons. Pierre Lupin's little pony knew her as well as he knew his own master: the very daisies in the fields doubtless felt it a pleasure to be plucked by her dainty fingers.

Who, after all, was this Fifi? Ah! the question had many a time been asked in the village. Who could answer it but Mère Pleuretout; and who so bold as to question *her*?

CHAPTER II.

MÈRE PLEURETOUT'S CHRISTMAS GIFT.

THE cliff, as we have said, rose grim and bare—a single barren rock out of the very centre of the valley. On the left it was perpendicular to its base. On the right the first range of hills leaned against it about midway to the summit, and formed, for a short distance, an open plateau, whence a view of the whole village could be obtained. On the lateral edge of this ran the highway to Paris, while upon the plateau itself, directly beneath the projecting brow of the cliff, which rose thence to an altitude of about two hundred feet, stood a venerable mansion, half concealed from the road by a lofty and partly crenelated wall. Though of unimposing

proportions, the house possessed, when a view of it was once fairly attained, a certain mediæval character, which seemed to postulate to it and its ecclesiastical neighbour a contemporary origin.

The house was built of stone, evidently quarried from the rock beside it. From the *corps-de-logis* within the enclosure a narrow wing extended to and presented its gable-end to the road. An elongation of the wall constituted its lower story, which, upon that side at least, was absolutely windowless. Higher up, and curiously wrought into an ornamental frieze, was a double window with spandrels. From the road, this much and an exasperating glimpse of chimney-tops were alone visible. There had once been a broad entrance, through which carriages had doubtless rolled, the outlines of which were yet traceable in the wall. The only means of ingress was now by a small door, which opened directly upon a quadrangular court paved with stone. The scene within was a sombre, and in many respects an impressive one. The main building rose—its rugged outlines sharply defined against the grey rock—at a

distance of about twenty feet. Its two low stories, with their narrow casements and iron bars, might have fitly served the grim requirements of a prison. These were surmounted by a balustrade, through which leering devils' faces, with open jaws gangrened with moss, were thrust at intervals. Above rose a huge attic, from which sprang wondrously beautiful dormers. At the intersection of the two roofs was a low octagonal tower, while, crowning all, was an immense clustered chimney of cunning design and workmanship.

The grass grew bravely in the fissures of pavement and walls, and a few creeping plants had striven, with ill success, to soften with their little store of bloom and freshness the ruggedness of the old mansion.

An arched doorway with corbels led to the interior, but from its appearance was little used. In fact, the presence of curtains at some of the windows barely sufficed to dispel the impression of absolute desertion and ruin.

Behind the house, and covering the whole remaining surface of the plateau—with stone

walls on three sides and the cliff itself flanking it on the north—extended a garden. It had once been orderly and well kept, but now the brightness of its parterres had overflowed into the paths and the grass. Weeds of the rankest growth had elbowed their way unrebuked among the flowers. A broken fountain gurgled feebly in the centre, while a few decrepit statues with storm-stained features looked down here and there from their pedestals in a helpless way upon the general desolation. So high were the encircling walls and so effectually did they shut out the world from the garden, that, aside from the blue sky by day and the stars by night, the cliff alone was visible, with the ever-present epiphany of Our Lady high above in the clouds.

As a compensation for the world's seclusion, the sun had a kindly way of throwing the shadow of the Good Mother right from the flamboyant steeple-top into the garden, and there it lay in the early afternoon hours in the grass among the daisies.

Of the old house's history little was known, either to Saint Loup or the world at large.

Many had been the conjectures as to its origin, innumerable the guesses as to its actual age. Legends there were in abundance, but they were for the most part as vague and intangible as is the wont of village tradition to be. Of actual knowledge, either as to its antiquity, history, or occupants, there was none. Official records set forth that it belonged to the family, or at least some member of the family of Bressilière, whoever he or she might be, and who, it was clear, set little store upon this sombre item in his or her possessions.

One tradition had it that when the fourth Henry, then King of Navarre and Huguenot, was fighting his liege near this very valley, La belle Gabrielle built her silken nest under the cliff, and that in those days the old house rang for many a night with song and jest and merrymaking.

During the Revolution it remained untenanted, as it was supposed, and was, for a wonder, unmolested. There were reasons subsequently brought to light, however, for believing that it had a mysterious occupant during the whole of that stormy period. It

was even whispered that an apartment had been prepared for royal occupation ; whispered, nothing more, however, for out of the mass of conjecture awakened by the very uncertainties of the case, only this much was absolutely known. Once during the first Empire—it was the winter preceding that disastrous Russian campaign—a perceptible stir was observed upon the hill ; lights went flitting strangely from window to window, and great people were vaguely believed to have been the guests of some phantom host. One night, however, the lights in the old house were extinguished, and for hours the air was full of shrieks. Whereupon the good villagers crossed themselves, and lay shivering in their beds until the dawn.

Then ensued a long interval of positive desertion—an interval of twenty years—during which no signs of life had ever been visible upon the hill. Then all at once smoke was seen ascending from the great clustered chimney ; a ruddy glow at night was observable above the garden wall, and a majestic figure—that of a woman, dressed in black and heavily veiled—was seen daily to

emerge from the gate and ascend to the church of Our Lady. When it was known that this woman had come without previous announcement to the village one summer afternoon, and, after an interview with the notary, had quietly taken possession of the old house, the event accorded so well with all its mysterious environments that the village curiosity was once more stirred from its very depths. Stirred in vain, however, for the seclusion of the fair unknown was as impenetrable as the sturdy walls of her stronghold.

The lapse of years, while deepening the mystery of her life, afforded no solution of the enigma. In the whole village Father Joseph alone had penetrated into the interior of her abode. His old servant, who possessed but one eye, and had a dreadful cast in the other, had whispered in the village that the good father had manifested great emotion when she first appeared at mass in the church of Our Lady. Acquainted as he actually was with the secret of her rank and the train of deplorable circumstances that had brought her to the desolate mansion, he

became devotedly attached to her person from the first, and continued her friend, her counsellor, and faithful servitor through all the years of her seclusion.

This was an enviable position in the eyes of the village folk, and they would fain have made of Father Joseph a medium for imparting the hidden mysteries of the house upon the hill. Many and wild had been the conjectures as to her manner of life. Her life to them seemed almost of an ethereal nature, far removed from the common wants and necessities of a vulgar existence, and as impenetrable as the halo of much sanctified mist usually surrounding saintly lives.

Her seclusion, however, was far from being absolute. Sickness and death stirred her sympathies and attracted her as by the law of gravitation, unsummoned to the bedside of the suffering. To the sick her very touch was healing. To the dying she whispered words which made them pass into eternity with a smile. In her intercourse with the village people there was a benignity and gentleness that won all hearts. Still, though the years had rolled around, and in whitening

her hair had doubtless given her many glimpses of the world's sorrow, there was ever in her manner a subtle, indefinable something which repelled familiarity, and kept well defined the bounds nature had assigned for her intercourse with mankind.

Between the seclusion of her home, the calls of charity, and heartfelt devotion at the shrine of Our Lady, her time was nearly equally divided. Daily through all the long years she had climbed by the narrow foot-path to the summit of the cliff, and there prostrated herself before the revered image, and poured forth supplications of which the world little knew the import. At such moments the other worshippers drew reverentially near, for it was believed that a holy influence emanating from the Virgin surrounded her and crowned her, could they but see it, like a glory—some little side-rays of which, if caught in course of transmission, would not be without their value in a propitiatory sense.

In the year 1848 she completed her fifty-second birthday, but there was still a stateliness in her demeanour, a certain dignity even

in her snow-white hair, an impressiveness in the undimmed lustre of her glorious eyes, that enforced instinctive respect and veneration. She had lived for fifteen years alone with a single servant named Clichette, the companion of her solitude and the possible repository of her secrets. If Clichette had filled the latter function, the secrets of the mistress were as inaccessible and safe as if they had remained for ever locked up in her own heart. The village *commères* had attacked Clichette in her presumably vulnerable points and signally failed. It was her habit to answer all questions of an inquisitorial nature with a testiness of rejoinder that in the end discomfited all her interlocutors.

Far and wide the solitary woman was known as Mère Pleuretout, and by many it was supposed to be her veritable name. It was not a pseudonym. The village had bestowed it upon her in lieu of a better. She had accepted it without comment of any kind. Clichette called her simply Madame. The reader by this time has conjectured who she really was.

A single word now as regards Fifine.

On Christmas-eve in the year 1844 Mère Pleuretout climbed the cliff as usual with the intention of remaining until midnight mass. Feeling snow-flakes upon her face as she entered the church, she remembered that the sun had gone down angry and red, and that a wild easterly gale had been screaming all day over the valley. Thereupon she burned a few candles at the shrine of Our Lady, and set out for her home. She heard a sullen roar in the valley like the booming of heavy breakers; as she entered the narrow path leading to the road a sharp gust of wind whipped a cloud of snow into her face; she saw the pines rocking in the blast far below. She covered her head with her hood and stood a moment in the shelter of a rock. On such nights as these the new-fledged devils of the Pit surely are let loose, and essay their first flight. She felt as it were the beating of black wings upon her face, and prepared to creep, rather than walk, down the slippery descent. Dark forms toiled past her now and then, and quickly disappeared in the gloom.

She was glad to reach the road at last.

The snow was three inches deep. She heard a chatter of icy twigs amid the hedgerows. Every creature of the vegetable world was shivering, stark naked, under the lash of the blast. Have trees, and shrubs, and all the denizens of leaf-land no feeling, we wonder! Have any of us ever seen the sensitive plant shrink like a timid girl from our touch?

Her sigh of relief when she perceived the wall of the old house through the driving snow was merged into the brazen clamour of the bell upon the cliff, that entreated, implored, and fairly stormed at the good people in the valley: and did it all in vain, it is to be feared, for village fires burned bright that night, and midnight mass in the clouds proved, for once, unattractive.

Arriving at the little gate, Mère Pleuretout was surprised and alarmed to perceive foot-prints and tracks of carriage-wheels in the snow so near the wall as to leave no doubt in her mind as to their signification. The bell was promptly answered by Clichette, who, with wonderment in her looks, exclaimed at the sight of her mistress:

“Hasten, madame, in the name of all

the saints ; there is a strange visitor within."

"Who is this intruder, Clichette ? and why have you so easily forgotten my injunctions ?" replied her mistress sternly.

"'Tis only a little girl, whom I verily believe, madame, has dropped upon us from the clouds," said Clichette softly.

"A child !"

Mère Pleuretout looked at her in a dumb sort of way, and followed her silently into the house.

"A child !" she faltered at the threshold of her apartment. "What can it mean ?" Then, as if ashamed of her weakness, she pushed the door resolutely open and entered, closely followed by Clichette.

A bright fire of wood glowed upon the hearth. Upon the rug, with her little feet outstretched toward the flame, sat a tiny creature, who sprang suddenly to her feet, displaying a pair of wondering blue eyes and a profusion of golden hair, all rippling down her back. She seemed dismayed for an instant, then, as Mère Pleuretout approached, she suddenly seized her robe and, look-

ing imploringly up into her face, exclaimed :

“ Are *you* my mother ? ”

Clichette, greatly scandalised, made the sign of the cross and looked with undisguised amazement at the daring little creature.

A look of pain passed across the usually calm features of her mistress ; then drawing the questioner into the light she replied :

“ My little one, I am not your mother ; who are you, and why do you ask such a strange question ? ”

“ Fifine is my name, and they told me somebody here would be my mother, and I thought it must be you, for I did not think *that* woman ”—pointing to Clichette—“ could be she. I have prayed so hard to the dear Christ for a mother, and oh dear ! oh dear ! I do want one so much,” she cried, breaking into a torrent of tears.

Mistress and maid looked at each other, and at the little sobbing thing with mutual wonder and dismay.

“ Clichette, how did she enter ? ” asked the former at length.

“ The bell rang, madame,” said Clichette,

"and I opened the door and found there, in the dark, the little one sitting crying upon a box in the snow. I imagined I heard the creak of carriage-wheels in the distance, but of that I am not quite sure, for the wind was in the other direction, and the snow probably would have deadened the sound.

"Strange—and this, too, is Christmas-eve," thought Mère Pleuretout. Then she turned to the little one again and said: "Where do you come from, my dear, and why have you sought me in this desolate old home?"

"I have sought nobody. I was brought here," replied Fifine, rubbing her eyes into a state of inflammation with her apron. "I came from Paris—from the convent where nobody loved me. Ursuline said she did; she was bigger than I, and we *were* friends until she said I was a disgrace, and was nobody's child; then I struck her with my prayer-book: it had a steel clasp and it made her head bleed. I was glad of it, and didn't care if they did make me live on bread and water for a week, for I *know* I hurt her. I should have been sorry if she had not said what she did. I am sure I am not a disgrace,

and all the girls had mothers. Even God had a mother, hadn't He? Oh, you *do* look so beautiful and good, and your hair is so nice and white. *Please* don't turn me away;" this in an imploring tone that sent the tears even into poor Clichette's eyes.

"But who brought you here, and why did you come?" persisted Mère Pleuretout, with a strange tremor in her voice.

"I don't know what I came for. Viquey brought me here. You don't know Viquey, of course; he's my guardian, Viquey is, and he's *so* good, and laughs beautifully when he chooses, which isn't often. He tells me he is very sad most of the time, and hopeful, too; that seems so queer to me. I can't make it out, can you? We came at first by the railroad; it was so strange! You know I had been in the convent so long—since—dear me!—since I was, oh! *ever* so much littler than I am now, and I was so frightened and so glad to get out of the train, it shook so, and went so fast. Then we got into a carriage with beautiful horses, and drove *such* a long way—to here; and I asked Viquey what he was stopping the horses for, but he

wouldn't tell me, but put me out in the snow right in front of this house, and laughed at me when I cried, and said that I mustn't be afraid, for I was going to see Mère Pleuret-out, and she would be my mother, and then the whip cracked and he went off laughing hard enough to give him a pain ; and here I am, and *you* are Mère Pleuretout, and you won't be my mother, and this house frightens me so much, and oh dear ! I must go back to Viquey again after all."

" But, my little one, did not this man give you a letter, or some token to deliver to me ?" interrupted the old lady, whose agitation was now painfully apparent.

" Oh dear ! oh dear ! I am so little, and so stupid—that is what the girls always said of me at the convent ;" here she looked reflective for a moment. " When is Christmas ?" she added at length, looking up with sudden interest. " This *is* Christmas, isn't it, when the Holy Virgin had a little Christ baby ?"

" Yes, my little dear."

" Then I haven't lost it out of my head after all. It seems so funny that I should be anybody's Christmas present, a silly little girl

like me ; but Viquey says I am Mère Pleure-tout's Christmas present from—here it is written on this piece of paper," she added, pulling a very much crumpled letter from her bosom.

Her babblement was cut short by a scream. The good lady had seized the little creature in her arms, and pressed her convulsively to her bosom; then sinking with her burden into a chair, she murmured :

" At last, God is good to me !"

Then her lips moved for an instant inaudibly, as if in prayer, and she started up again, her eyes kindled with pleasure, her cheeks glowing with excitement.

" My darling," she cried, " I am getting old, but so long as the good God gives me breath, so long will I indeed be a mother to you ;" then, turning toward the stupefied servant : " Clichette, henceforth this little girl is one of us, and"—stooping to whisper something in her ear which made poor Clichette laugh hysterically for full five minutes, and hug the little creature too. " Run, Clichette, prepare a room for our darling, and pile up the fire still higher, and light all the candles,

and lay the cloth for supper, for this is Christmas-eve, and God has indeed been good to us all."

Oh! it would have done your heart good, reader, to have heard the shout of that little minx, when Viquey—her Viquey—came tumbling in, half smothered in snow at supper-time; Viquey, nearly frozen with standing so long in the cold, to watch the result of his stratagem—whom Clichette would have hugged on the spot if she dared, instead of crying, like a great baby, as she did; Viquey, the whole-souled, generous Viquey, who we know at once to be none other than our old friend D'Harmental.

And thus Fifine came to Saint Loup—a veritable fairy, tumbled out of the clouds upon a Christmas-eve.

CHAPTER III.

RETROSPECTIVE.

A WORD suffices to bridge the widest gulf in time, and the briefest epitome of human life is without question afforded by the tombstone.

Here lies the body of John Smith.

Born A.D. 1600. Died A.D. 1670.

There is certainly no want of unity in *that* story, and with a further recital of irrelevant virtues we care not the snap of a finger, unless we chance to possess antiquarian tastes : for a tombstone, however complimentary in gilt lettering, never yet made or perpetuated a man's reputation. *That* is abroad in the air, and is as subtle as the air itself, and cannot be chiselled into stone. It may be but a passing breeze, or become a steady trade-wind blowing through all the Eternities.

Happily, however, the interval between the years 1833 and 1848, though a broad and deep chasm in our story, is not a grave, and a few echoes will therefore find their way into these pages.

The Countess de Rauville, it would be an affectation to call her *Mère Pleuretout* longer, had quitted the hôtel in the Rue de Varennes, early in June, 1833. Though left in charge of a few servants, and subject to the occasional supervision of the family notary, it was the prevailing opinion in the Quartier St. Germain that the splendid hôtel was fast going to ruin. Many things gave colour to this supposition. Year after year rolled round, and the hinges on the gates became rusty, and the windows of the empty lodge assumed a grimy and cobwebbed aspect ; the garden grew into a jungle, and the unswept leaves of many autumns simmered all day long in the ragged paths. So gloomy and desolate, in fact, had the whole place become, that it might have formed a not inappropriate appendage of the neighbouring Convent of the Sacred Heart.

For a few months subsequent to her departure, the world was greatly exercised over the

event, and employed itself in the fabrication of reasons, more or less plausible, for this absolute desertion of one of the grandest hôtels in the quarter. When this ebullient mass of conjecture and surmise had cooled, it crystalised into the belief that Marie de Laferrière had gone into a convent, whither she had been followed by the Countess, her mother.

This was true to some extent, of the Countess. The old home at Saint Loup, which she had inherited from her father, partook in many respects of the nature of a cloister; and it is certain that her life, in its simple austerity and the conventual rigor of its devotion, was none other than that of a recluse.

She had greatly changed in this long interval. The ice had broken up in that proud heart; the temper of the steel had departed in those fierce early heats. Bending her knees submissively before the dumb Baal of her affliction, she waited patiently for the time, when surcease of her sorrow would come, in the return of the absent one. She had rebelled at first against the inexorable conditions of her great affliction; had made a desperate effort to dis-

cover Marie and pluck her, as she would some stolen gem, from her hiding place; had even spent a month of fruitless search in London with this end in view. When the few combustible remnants of her pride, which lent fuel to this search, had burned out, she returned resignedly to the old house under the cliff, and waited thenceforth from week to week, from month to month, from year to year, for the coming of her child. This hope had not seemed altogether germless. It would surely thrive—it would bloom, and bring forth sweet fruit. She buried it deep in her heart, watered it with her tears, let in the broad sunshine of faith upon it, and tenderly nursed it through all these years. Ah! the loving, long enduring patience of a mother. The spring-time had passed, the summer had come and gone, the drear period of frost and icicles was drawing nigh, and she was fast despairing, when upon a Christmas-Eve, little Fifine had come as an earnest of the full fruition of all her hopes in the approaching time.

Thenceforth she was, if anything, still more patient. A smile, at times, loitered about her mouth. She appeared to have made a

retrograde movement as to time; that particularly quiet and shady spot in the village churchyard she had selected as her final resting-place suddenly lost all attraction for her; she even began to compute the number of years, which, according to the laws of human probability, she had yet to live. Surely, now that the Lord had been so good to her, He would not withhold the completed blessing for which she had so long and earnestly prayed?

Strange to say, she did not complain of the obduracy of Marie's behaviour. She took it as a scourge and punishment for her own harsh treatment. She often heard of her, and from her, through the mediation of the Vicomte d'Harmontal, for whom she had conceived an almost motherly regard. She did not, knowing the gentleness and fervour of his great honest heart, reproach him for conspiring against her peace. She appeared resigned and humbly grateful for the partial blessing that had so unexpectedly come to her.

Nothing in the old house upon the hill, aside from Fifine herself, was so precious to

the Countess as a piece of crumpled paper upon which was written :

“ This little girl is Fifiue de Laferrière. She was born on the 25th of December, 1832, in the Rue de Picpus, No 42, Paris ; and upon this her twelfth birthday, she wishes to make the acquaintance of her good grandmother, the Countess de Rauville.”

Marie de Laferrière had remained in London but a short time, when she conceived the bold idea of essaying a public career. She possessed beauty—always a prime element of success—more or less of the dramatic instinct, and the voice of a seraph ; so, taking an inventory of her small possessions, and dismissing Clichette—not without grief on both sides, and the stipulation that she would seek service with the Countess—Marie proceeded in the autumn of 1833, to Milan, where she devoted herself for a number of years to the study of the musical art. Her *début* at La Scala made a profound impression. One critic, indeed, who was malevolent as the serpent is, by nature, lifted up his head to strike. But, for once, his bite was innocuous ; her triumph proved to be an effec-

tive antidote to all the virus he could command. Her success was brilliantly re-affirmed in London, and English society—with a possible hint as to her rank from D'Harmontal, who was often in London in these days—opened wide its doors, and lavished its hospitality upon the fair young Queen of Song.

Bewhiskered and moustached worshippers were, as a consequence, constantly at her feet; but they might as well have fallen prone before dumb and sightless marble:—the deathless ichor of passion had not been infused into her veins with that one brief touch of Promethean fire; the Galatea, frozen into her original impassivity, had neither eyes nor ears for the rhapsodies of lovers.

But the Vicomte, undaunted and undismayed at the flight of years, followed her everywhere at intervals—respectfully, submissively, patiently. He even crossed the Atlantic, though not in the same vessel, for he would give no man a chance to speak ill of her, and was present that first night in New York, when the little opera-house in Astor Place shook with her triumph, as with an

earthquake. He went to Boston and Philadelphia. When she sang he never failed to be at the theatre, content to watch her from a distance. When she returned to her hôtel he followed her like a dog, lest insult or harm of some kind might befall her on her way. As a rule, there was little need for this precaution ; but upon one occasion—it was at Philadelphia—he found himself seated beside Henri de Laferrière, saw the deep cicatrice in his cheek where the Marquis's sword had fallen ; heard the exclamation of surprise and the oath that followed when Marie stepped before the footlights ; pursued him into the open air, when the last act of the opera was nearly over, and saw him take up a position by the stage door.

Divining his purpose, and knowing the effect the meeting would have upon Marie, he immediately decided upon a course of action. Fortunately, this was the last night of her engagement in America ; in two days she was to sail for England. Assuming the language and manner, therefore, of a man labouring under some great excitement, he gesticulated wildly to a policeman standing

near, and seizing the astonished Henri de Laferrière by the collar, exclaimed :

“ Arrest this man—he has stolen my pocket-book ! Arrest him, policeman ! ”

There was such vehemence in the charge, that in spite of Henri’s protestations, he was haled with great despatch to the nearest station house. The next morning, in the absence of a prosecuting witness, he was released with a warning and an intimation that the eyes of the police would henceforth be upon him. By that time Marie was on her way to New York, and the next day she embarked for Liverpool. Not for many years did she know of Henri’s presence that night in Philadelphia.

Do not infer from the above, that the Vicomte was at all times absent from Paris, during these three long lustrums. That wee mite of a Fifine—next to Marie, the most precious human morsel in the broad universe—was a loadstone which was sure to draw him thither. Until she went into the convent he saw her almost daily. It is needless to say that he was beloved by the little creature, who called him *Mus Viquey*—a corruption

of the nurse's M. le Vicomte (every child in the world has a patois of its own), which at last lapsed into simple Viquey, and was laughingly approved by him. He loved this little creature, as we have said, to distraction ; but *one* thing annoyed him beyond measure, and that was the golden hair and the blue eyes. It seemed to him, by that token, less Marie's child than Henri de Laferrière's. Still, this could not seriously militate against his affection for her ; she was after all, a reflection of the divinity who, to him, outshone Olympus itself. He could fondle and caress her, and this vicarious fondling was not without its advantages.

Ordinary star-gazers and worshippers do not in fact possess this advantage. It is not more difficult to pluck a planet from the welkin, than it is to seize its only offspring—a mere shadow that the water bears, as the nurse does a child, for a time, upon its bosom.

D'Harmontal found time also, for an occasional visit to the château in Brittany, where his good mother still led her saint-like life. To her, he early unburdened his heart, and expressed the hope that the time would

some day come, when a bride and a daughter should tread the stately halls; and festive fires should gleam from every window; and the very smoke from the chimneys should be succulent with the good cheer from within. Not until then, he told her, would the day-dream of the dead soldier, father, and husband, be fully realised.

Pitou and Gervaise had prospered amazingly. Their first baby was—in obedience to the Vicomte's commands—a boy, and was promptly christened Charles d'Harmontal Pitou. Not without unheard of honours, however, for the Vicomte presented his young Pitouship with something in *argenterie*, that was not destitute of a certain intrinsic value; while Papillon brought to the christening feast a silver mug that set the little salon in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs all in a dazzle, and would, with its inebriating capacity, have served the purposes of a loving-cup for the Lord Mayor of London himself.

The *gants-Papillon*, underwent no deterioration at the hands of *Pitou-successeur*. In fact an important technical improvement in their manufacture, secured by *brevet d'in-*

vention, brought them into such repute, that another *maisonette* at Auteuil promised to be the upshot of it all.

D'Harmontal's predictions had been abundantly verified as to Michaud's reappearance. That uncomfortable creature appeared in due course upon his path, in the character of a suppliant for alms. Hoping that he might prove useful at some day, in unravelling the hitherto inexplicable mystery of the marriage-certificate, the Vicomte was not illiberal, and even went so far in the furtherance of this purpose, as to pay his passage to America. This was in July, 1848.

The Marquis de Laferrière had married Mdlle. de Campvallon, early in the year 1833, and within twelve months the object he had had in seeking her hand was attained, in the birth to him of a son and heir. Madame de Laferrière fulfilled her part of the contract faithfully. She soon discovered that he had no love for her; but in spite of all that, she did her best, and died in the act of conferring upon him a much desired boon.

Just how much he had been touched by this, it is difficult to tell. Still more difficult

would it have been to determine whether the image of Marie de Rauville had been effaced from his heart. He lived a reserved and studious life—for the most part in his château. No thoughts of remarriage had, seemingly, ever entered his mind. What affection he possessed, appeared to be centred upon his child, a dark, curly-haired, beautiful boy, whom everybody loved, and who, in the summer-time of this 1848, was staying with his grandfather Campvallon within sight of the spire of Our Lady of the Cliff.

CHAPTER IV.

UP IN THE BELL-TOWER.

RELEASED from the convent, where her spirit was cramped and pruned of all exuberances, Fifine bloomed like a wild flower in the fresh and invigorating air of St. Loup. At twelve she was a child—little Fifine only. At fifteen she became a child-woman, and perplexed herself in secret with certain recondite problems, mostly arising from the discovery that there was a generic distinction between boys and girls. The Countess watched carefully over the blossoming of this precious plant; but the air was too pure and fresh about the cliff to permit any blight coming upon it.

The village people were simple-minded,



and free from the commoner vices of the cities. There were no young men with whom Fifine could by any possibility have fallen in love. Mere height, and bulk, and muscularity made no impression upon her. Her robin, with its helplessness and its sweet twitter of welcome, was more to her than a hawk, with its scream, its strength of tendon and beak, and its ability to overrun a whole robin world. The village lads were great stalwart, honest fellows, but their hands were large and coarse, they wore sabots on week-days, and they spoke in a strange, unmelodious patois.

No. No. Rarely, indeed, does harm come to a woman's honour, save through her woman's heart. Good, honest Jeannot, in the sabots, could never win *that*. No amount of wooing will induce the peach to grow upon the thistle.

What Fifine knew of this, however, she knew unconsciously. One cannot formulate an instinct, and who can determine the key of the nightingale's song? Hers was neither the complaisance of the lilies, to blow and be plucked by the glebe-stained hands of yokels,

nor the philosophy of the stars to shine and be dumb. She waited, feeling something expand and grow within her, for a revelation of its meaning. Of love in its fullest signification, she knew nothing as yet. Of course she knew all about Christ's love, and what the pyx contained, and why the people knelt when the Host was held aloft. Yes, she knew all this.

Of marriage, too, she had heard the banns read from the pulpit, had seen them nailed up upon the church door. She had even seen Jeannot lead Jeanette to the altar-steps, and listened, as Father Joseph said in that beautiful bass voice of his : "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder." But she saw no change in either Jeannot or Jeannette ; they merely walked out of the church as they had come in, arm in arm, and with very red faces, while children in white threw flowers in their path, flowers which Fifine regretted to see were crushed into bleeding masses beneath the bridegroom's hob-nail boots. When she was fifteen she summoned up courage enough to ask Father Joseph the meaning of marriage.

and free from the commoner vices of the cities. There were no young men with whom Fifine could by any possibility have fallen in love. Mere height, and bulk, and muscularity made no impression upon her. Her robin, with its helplessness and its sweet twitter of welcome, was more to her than a hawk, with its scream, its strength of tendon and beak, and its ability to overrun a whole robin world. The village lads were great stalwart, honest fellows, but their hands were large and coarse, they wore sabots on week-days, and they spoke in a strange, unmelodious patois.

No. No. Rarely, indeed, does harm come to a woman's honour, save through her woman's heart. Good, honest Jeannot, in the sabots, could never win *that*. No amount of wooing will induce the peach to grow upon the thistle.

What Fifine knew of this, however, she knew unconsciously. One cannot formulate an instinct, and who can determine the key of the nightingale's song? Hers was neither the complaisance of the lilies, to blow and be plucked by the glebe-stained hands of yokels,

nor the philosophy of the stars to shine and be dumb. She waited, feeling something expand and grow within her, for a revelation of its meaning. Of love in its fullest signification, she knew nothing as yet. Of course she knew all about Christ's love, and what the pyx contained, and why the people knelt when the Host was held aloft. Yes, she knew all this.

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"It is God's way of making fathers and mothers," said the good man after some reflection.

So that when Jeanette took Fifine, many months afterward, into her cottage, and showed her a little wee Jeannot, not much bigger than her own robin, she stood a moment in silence beside the cradle, then said :

"And so God has made you a mother. You went to the church with Jeannot for that. I understand it all now."

Jeannette blushed, and laughed, and declared that Mademoiselle Fifine was a strange young lady.

Young lady ! Ah ! yes. There could be no doubt upon that point now. Was she not fifteen upon the last Christmas-eve, when, through over-weeping on the part of the Countess, it had transpired that she had a mother, a beautiful mother, somewhere in the world ?

She spent much of her time upon the summit of the cliff. For her the old church possessed a strange fascination ; she explored its crypts, and climbed up the crazy ladders

to the very steeple-top. She was on terms of visual familiarity with every pictured saint in the beautiful windows, every recumbent effigy upon the marble tombs. She was deep in the arcana of altar decoration ; she knew what the incense was made of. Father Joseph, indulgent as a veritable father to her in all things, permitted her investigations to go still further even. His little presbytère adjoined the church—a low-covered passage, in fact, connecting them. Into this, also, she penetrated. It was a bleak and cheerless place, with brick floors and bare walls, and great open fireplaces, upon which—such was the good man's frugality—fires seldom gleamed. There was but little there to see, in truth, but Fifine peered into the pages of the Sunday's homily, as it lay upon the table (whence a complacent interest in its perusal from the pulpit afterwards). She held daily conferences in the kitchen with the one-eyed servant over the meagreness of the curé's soup, and the rasping thinness of his wine, both of which she was in the habit of tasting. She stood interdicted, it is true, at the threshold of Father Joseph's chamber where such books

as he possessed were carefully stored ; and this to her, of course, was a perfect Blue Beard chamber. There, behind the closed door, bloomed the Tree of Knowledge. There, close at hand, was the unravelled mystery of the Cabala. So is—what is hidden—to all women—even at fifteen.

Behind that oaken door was simply a musty bedroom, with a few book-shelves, heaped up with monkish incoherencies.

The sacristy, though, was an awesome place ; being dimly-lighted, and made positively ghastly by the presence of a waxen and thorn-crowned Christ, from whose face blood was perpetually exuding ; at least, this was Fifine's impression—though she was not deterred by the gruesome sight from opening the presses in order to examine the embroidery upon the stoles ; and she even ventured, at times, with fear and trembling, to take the monstrance and the chalice in her hands.

Two tall silver candlesticks upon the altar, however, were the objects of her especial admiration, for they had been given to Our Lady of the Cliff by Viquey. Exactly why, she could not tell, but it was for some reason

with which her mother was connected. This much, however, she *did* know.

Once, at the conclusion of a marriage ceremony, she had intercepted Father Joseph on his way to the sacristy, and said :

“ Was my mother married like that ? ”

“ Yes, my dear,” he answered.

“ Did *you* marry her, Father Joseph ? ”

The good man started ; the abruptness of the question was positively confusing.

“ I see,” she continued, “ you did.”

He could not evade the earnest look that came from her eyes. He was not an adept in the art of prevarication, and though he felt that a frank and open avowal might be contrary to the Countess’s desires, he made it at once nevertheless.

“ Yes, I did,” he answered gently.

“ Where, Father Joseph ? Here ? ”

“ Just where you stand. Yes.”

“ And so she got to be a mother in that way.”

“ Yes, Fifine.”

“ And that, then, is why *I* am here. Oh, you are so good to tell me this,” and she seized his hand and kissed it.

Every day, from that time forth, she brought a flower or some green thing and laid it upon the spot.

"When she comes she will see that I remember her," she said to herself, with a complacent smile.

Once, as Father Joseph observed her in the act, she looked up and asked :

"Then I had a father too?"

"Yes," he answered, getting well accustomed by this time to her abrupt manner.

"And will *he* return some day as well?"

"I know not, my daughter."

"Then he is not dead; if he were dead you would say at once that he *could* not come."

He was silent.

"Is he beautiful and good, like her?" she asked.

"Alas! I fear not, my darling," he answered sorrowfully turning away.

She caught hold of his cassock.

"Tell me," she continued, "you are Father Joseph; where are your children?"

He stooped and kissed her on the forehead.

"You are one of them, my little one," he said gently, then went away shaking his head.

But she did not understand this one bit.

Nothing delighted her more than to climb high up in the steeple and sit for hours among the bells. Nothing was easier to do; a little door at the foot of the tower, always unbolted, and presided over by no guardian—as is the case at Notre Dame de Paris—through which she could glide in and out twenty times a day if she so desired. It was so lofty up there, where the bells lived. St. Loup lay below, curled up amid apple orchards—a beautiful picture when once you had climbed to that dizzy height—you were so much nearer the stars than you would be below, reader. This is what Fifine thought.

Bluff, hearty companions, too, were those bells. She stroked and fondled them; she brushed the dust and rubbed the rust from them with her handkerchief, and when she had completed their toilette it was her fancy that she heard a low hum as of whispering going on among them, especially if the wind blew shrilly up the valley and drove her,

with many an indecorous dash at her skirts, into a corner of the belfry when the task was done. It *was* a gusty place, indeed, at times, and she was forced to sit, tightly holding on to her hat, behind one of the stanchions, from where she could see the trees rock and the poplars on the high-road making such stiff and formal salutations to each other that it invariably provoked her laughter ; while far below in the village every vegetable thing was tussling bravely in the grip of the wind.

Above her head arose a mass of interlacing timbers, black, vermiculated, filling the whole cap of the tower. There were no spider's webs there ; that fact being the corollary of another fact that flies never ascended to that altitude. For similar reasons, perhaps, the Mer de Glace has never been infested with poachers. The swallows, however, had long been tenants of Our Lady, and much industrious nest-building had been going on for ages beneath the leads of the old tower. Fifine alarmed them on her first visit, but she provided herself with bread crumbs on the second, and soon

became on a very familiar footing with them indeed.

One day—it was late in August—she was seated there upon a window-ledge, looking down into the valley. The air was perfectly still and drowsy. The wind might have gone down to sleep in the grass under the apple-trees for all she knew. The bells hung motionless with their great tongues lolling out as with the heat. She could at times hear a faint tinkling of pebbles, as they boiled in the stream below; the cluck of a self-satisfied hen just emerging from her nest under a gooseberry bush, the yelp of a dog, the sharpening of a scythe in the meadows.

At last came another noise, seemingly from within the steeple. She heard the swaying and the creaking of the crazy old ladders, she saw a twitching movement in one of the bell-ropes, followed by a smart tap upon the bell itself. Then she heard a laugh right under the floor, and a cheery voice which said :

“I beg your pardon, mademoiselle, but may I come in ?”

She looked down and saw a merry face

with black eyes, close curly hair, and the bonniest of smiles slowly rising through the trap-door.

"If you please," she answered, by no means dismayed at the pleasant apparition.

When the possessor of the face, a boy of fourteen, reached the platform, he pulled off his hat and bowed.

"May I ask, Mademoiselle, if you live up here?" he asked.

"No; but the swallows do. I am a friend of theirs, and I just dropped up here to feed them. I have never had the pleasure of meeting you up here before," she answered with a toss of her head.

"Well, since the laws of gravitation are reserved in this part of the world, I just dropped up here to see—to see——"

"What then?"

"Ah! but I have changed my mind. I want to know whether you will introduce me to your friends."

"The swallows?"

"Yes."

"Oh, certainly! but you must have some bread. Mine is all gone—see!" and she

extended a pair of rosy palms in attestation of the fact.

He took them both in his, looked at them a moment, and said :

“ They are better as they are.”

“ But you see,” she pursued, resuming possession of her hands, “ the swallows are like all the rest ; they are friendly when your hands are full, and fly away as soon as they are empty.”

“ Oh !” he rejoined, lifting his eyebrows, “ you are the village schoolmistress perhaps.”

Fine laughed outright.

“ *Me !*” she exclaimed.

“ Yes ; what you have just said my tutor always used to say. *He* called it philosophy.”

“ Oh, *I* spoke principally of bread or corn ; chickens prefer corn mostly, I think,” she said with great earnestness.

He was but a boy himself. But being full of intuitions, and possessing an early developed clearness of perception, he was astonished at the simplicity of this young girl. She was not a rustic maiden, *that* much was clear. She had beautiful features ; her hands

and feet were small and exquisitely shaped; her eyes mirrored the depths of a summer sky, and looked into his—here, at the top of an old church tower—with a fearlessness that quite astonished him. This was altogether a new experience with him. There are some instincts as mature at fourteen as at sixty. He had rarely met with young ladies, except to look at them askance through the iron bars of propriety, and it was certainly a pleasurable emotion to stand thus for the first time face to face and alone, with a lovely young creature like this.

He looked at her curiously a moment before answering.

“You are different from any young lady I have ever seen,” he said at last.

“And I was thinking the same of you,” she retorted with a laugh.

“That is a coincidence, then, is it not?”

“It is, really. You see,” she pursued with great earnestness, “the village lads have big, coarse hands, and speak—well—thick, as if they all had dreadful colds, you know. *You* are not a bit like that”—this in a tone of strong conviction.

"And do you know all the village lads then?" he demanded, in the manner of one who felt this to be a most annoying circumstance.

"Oh, yes! or at least," she added after a reflective pause, "I did before I was fifteen."

"And you are fifteen then!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I was that last Christmas."

Here he took a seat on the window-ledge beside her.

"Fifteen," he repeated thoughtfully. "I should never have believed it. Why *I* am only *fourteen*!"

She sprang up, pushed back his hat from his forehead and looked him straight in the eyes.

"You are only fourteen!" she exclaimed.

"That is all."

She burst into a perfect scream of laughter.

"To think!" she said at last with a gasp.

"It seems the most ridiculous thing! Why if I had gone to the church and got married when I was one year old *I might have been your mother*!" and she screamed again.

He pulled his hat over his eyes, thrust his hands into his pockets, started to his feet,

and began to pace the platform, whistling "La Belle Bourbonnaise."

"Well," she said, "you need not be offended; you know it is true."

Then he faced around.

"Tell me," he said, "does your mother approve your climbing up into steeples in this way?"

"Mère Pleuretout does," she answered; "I have never seen my real original mother."

"Oh!" he rejoined, suddenly lowering his voice, "I hope she's not—up there?" and he pointed to the sky.

"No, no!" with emphasis.

"Ah, well! your father, then—what does *he* say?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I have never seen him either."

"Perhaps *he* is," and he motioned once more toward the clouds.

"No, no!" she answered, making a very round O of her little mouth.

"Neither of them dead?"

"Neither."

"Where *are* they, then?"

"I don't know, I am sure."

"What an extraordinary girl you are! Is your name Pleuretout?"

"Oh, no; it is Fifine."

"Fifine! That is pretty! Fifine what?"

"Fifine de Laferrière."

He started back in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Why, mademoiselle, that is my name," he exclaimed.

Fifine was equally amazed.

"Suppose," she said, "that I was married after all, and I had forgotten all about it!"

"Well!" he said, smiling.

"Well! wouldn't it be ludicrous if I *did* turn out to be your mother? that is all!"

"Nonsense," he rejoined; "my mother is in the skies."

"Are you quite sure?" this with an air of great anxiety.

"Quite."

"Where do *you* come from then?"

"From Campvallon," he answered; "and we should be able to see it from here," glancing over the eastern horizon; "there, I thought so. Look through the trees at the

bend in the valley ; do you see a square tower to the left ?”

“ Yes, yes,” she said, standing on tiptoe and peering over his shoulder.

“ Well,” he replied, “ my grandfather lives there, and I am spending my vacation with him.”

Fifine took another look and drew a deep sigh.

“ Well,” she said, “ I think I had better go now, though I find this very amusing. My bread is all gone, you see, and your grandfather might be anxious about you. Mère Pleuretout, I am sure, will be looking for *me* if I remain another minute.

“ Who *is* Mère Pleuretout ?” he demanded, following her to the trap-door.

“ She is my grandmother.”

“ Is she nice ?”

“ Oh ! very.”

“ Does she let you come up here whenever you like ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Will you come to-morrow ?”

“ Oh ! certainly.”

“ May I come again too ?”

She paused in the act of descending the ladder.

"Yes, if you wish, of course ; only you need not bring any bread with you. I think I'd rather feed the swallows myself. They are more accustomed to me, you know."

"Then I shall bring no bread. Wait, though, one minute! give me your hand, mademoiselle, you may fall."

She laughed derisively, but put her little hand in his nevertheless.

When they were at the bottom Fifine said :

"Mère Pleuretout will be surprised to hear that I have met you, I think."

"Oh ! I wouldn't tell her if I were you," he answered quickly.

"Why ? I tell her everything," this with eyes very wide open with astonishment.

"Well, do so if you wish ; but I wouldn't, I say, if I were in your place. She might not let you come if she knew I was there, and you know you asked me to bring no bread for the swallows."

"Well, but she might ask if I had seen *you*," persisted Fifine, perplexed and wavering.

"Then tell her, by all means. But I should be *so* sorry not to meet you again, cousin."

Fifine stared.

"Why do you call me cousin?"

"We must be cousins of some degree or we should not both of us be named de Laferrière. So good-bye, Cousin Fifine."

This seemed conclusive.

"Good-bye, cousin—" said she, and took his extended hand in hers, laughed, and hesitated.

"Honoré," he said.

"Good-bye, Cousin Honoré; we shall feed the swallows together to-morrow," and with another laugh she ran across the level summit of the cliff, and disappeared in the path leading to the old house below.

He went to the edge and stood, with his hat in his hand, watching her white dress flutter along the hedgerows, until, turning a sharp angle in the rock, she disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER V.

UNFED SWALLOWS.

THEY fed the swallows together, the next and for many succeeding days, thanks to the compact of silence between them.

It was a dangerous business for two young hearts, this feeding of birds up there so near the stars, and when, one day, a thunder-shower surprised them there, and the steeple rocked and the red zig-zags danced a very dance of death about them, it all came out that they had been lovers from the day of that first meeting, and they solemnly agreed, holding fast of each other's hands the while, that if Our Lady spared their lives, they would, in the fulness of time, with Our Lady's blessing, become man and wife. Strange to

say, at that moment the clouds parted, just where the sun was, and down came his benediction upon the children's heads.

It was just like the sun. If any genial business is going on in the broad universe—even if it be such a callow matter as the love-making of two children—he is sure, somehow, to have his hand in it.

The sun's best intentions, however, are often frustrated by accident.

Father Joseph was not over vigilant, and much love-making might have taken place under his very nose. But Toinette, his old servant—though she had but one eye, it was a hawk's eye, and had a telescopic range of vision—she at length descried our lovers in the belfry, and promptly apprised Father Joseph of the fact. The result was, that the latter stationed himself at the door at the foot of the tower, and intercepted them when they finally reached *terra firma*. Fifine, without having anything particular to blush about, blushed nevertheless; and her face, for the first time in her life, wore a look of shame as she encountered the inquiring glance of the curé's eyes. Honoré, to the contrary,

was quite unabashed, and would have pushed by, with a single salutation, had not the curé laid his hand upon Fifine's arm and said :

"My daughter, I wish to speak to you, one moment, alone."

She hesitated ; glanced first at Honoré, and then at Father Joseph, and at last said :

"Good-bye, Honoré. I must stay, I suppose, if Father Joseph wishes me to."

Honoré relinquished her hand—it had hitherto been clasped in his—removed his hat, and slowly walked away. At the edge of the cliff, where the path opened, he paused, turned, and deliberately kissed his hand to Fifine. Then he disappeared from view.

"Who is that young man ?" asked the curé sternly.

"Honoré."

"Honoré, is it ! and so you have been up in the steeple with him ?"

"Yes."

"Is this the first time you have done so ?"

"No, Father Joseph."

Her eyes were cast down, but revolt was brewing in her heart. She commenced to kick the stones in the path with her foot.

"This is not a seemly thing, Fifine," said he gravely.

"And why?"

The question came as clear as a bell. The blue eyes were fixed intently enough on his now.

"Your conscience should answer that question."

"Tell me why that should be, Father Joseph?" she answered, seizing him by the cassock and looking him straight in the face. "What have I done? We have fed the swallows, Honoré and I; there is no harm in *that*, I am sure. We had to climb the steeple, of course—anybody but a stupid would know we could not do it else."

"But this young man! he is a stranger; he may be no proper companion for you!" said the curé.

"He is not a stranger. He is my cousin, and he *is* a proper companion, and he is much nicer than *you* were when you were fourteen,

I am sure! You may go straight into the church and ask Our Lady if I have done anything wrong. You are altogether too cross with me, and if I had known you were going to abuse Honoré so, I certainly should have gone down the Cliff with him, and I am sorry I didn't, so there; now good-bye, Father Joseph;" and away she tripped with a bound, and disappeared over the edge before the astonished curé could utter a word in reply.

Toinette at this moment came out of the *presbytère*.

"My good father," said she, "did you see the young man kiss his hand to mademoiselle as he went down the path?"

"Oh! Toinette, it would be dreadful if anything should happen to that child! What would Mère Pleuretout say to me? I must go to her at once. I feel there is a responsibility upon my shoulders which I am unwilling to assume and carry."

"He is but a young lad," said Toinette; "he may have intended no harm."

"Maybe not, but my duty is clear, nevertheless."

"He looked so handsome as he turned and kissed his hand," said Toinette, after a reflective pause.

"Well, what if he did?"

"He may be fond of the little creature. I am sure he is. If you could have seen his face as I did!"

"Toinette, what do you mean?"

"If you *do* see Mère Pleuretout, don't be hard on the dear innocents, that is all."

To tell the truth, Toinette seriously regretted at this moment, that she had looked up at the steeple at all. Like all women whose personal interests are not at stake, she was pleased at the sight of juvenile billing and cooing. She would as soon have robbed a linnet's nest, as to have brought discomfiture upon "those babes," as she afterwards expressed it. Her remorse, however, as is usually the case, was of no avail. The curé turned to her with his sternest manner, and said :

"Toinette, this is very unbecoming talk in a woman of your age and respectability, and I am surprised to hear it. My duty, as a

Christian minister, is clear. I shall acquaint Mère Pleuretout with the affair at once."

Which he immediately proceeded to do.

The *rez-de-chaussée* of the house under the cliff was—with the exception of the kitchen at its western extremity—never used by the Countess; its rooms being locked and filled with old lumber, and the *disjecta membra* of household furniture. On the first floor were three large salons, and an oratory in the octagonal tower which was now Fifine's bed-chamber. Of these, the salon overlooking the garden was the only one used as such by the Countess. The centre one was now the *salle à manger*; the third, communicating with Fifine's room she had appropriated to her private use.

Into the salon—which was sombre, but magnificent, with carved oak and heavy tapestries thoroughly in keeping with the character of the house—Father Joseph, a few minutes later, was shown by Clichette:

"Has Fifine returned?" he asked, with startling abruptness, as the Countess appeared at the doorway.

She perceived his look of inquietude, and hastily answered :

"No ; has anything happened, Father Joseph ?"

"A young man——" he commenced, when she interrupted him with :

"A young man ! what of a young man ?"

"In the steeple, madame," he faltered.

"What has the steeple to do with Fifine ? You do not speak with your usual coherency, *mon père*," she said, with a fine display of colour.

You know, madame, that Fifine has a dangerous habit of climbing to the belfry ?"

"Well."

"To feed the birds."

"Well ! well !"

"*Eh bien !* she has not been doing it alone."

The Countess's face was quite scarlet by this time.

"Go on, Father Joseph," said she ; "whatever has occurred has taken place beneath your nose, and you can furnish me with full particulars, I am sure. Go on."

The good man, conscious of a sudden,

sharp twinge of conscience, felt the blood mounting to his ears as he returned :

"She has been in the habit of meeting a young man, madame——"

"And who, pray, is the young man?"

"I know nothing more about it than this : my servant, perceiving them together in the belfry, promptly called my attention to the fact ; this was about twenty minutes ago ; I then stationed myself beside the door at the foot of the tower, where I intercepted the young people as they descended. I detained Fifine, and proceeded to question her, when, irritated I suppose by my interposition, she ran away before I could ascertain the name of the young man ; so I felt it my duty, madame, to apprise you at once of what has taken place."

At this moment Fifine entered the room. She stopped on the threshold, gave a quick, indignant look at the curé, then approached, swinging her hat by a ribbon.

"Fifine," said the Countess sternly, "who is this young man with whom you climb steeples?"

Fifine wheeled about, and surveyed the curé from head to foot.

"Have you told her about Honoré?" she demanded.

He nodded assent.

"I call that tattling," she answered, with a burning spot appearing upon each cheek. "You are a *babillard*, Father Joseph."

Then, turning toward the Countess, she added :

"Honoré is his name, and he is my cousin ; he is not wicked, not a bit, and I like him very much, *very much indeed*, so there."

There was something so extraordinary about this, that the Countess put up her eyeglasses, and surveyed Fifine in perfect amazement.

"Your cousin!" she exclaimed.

"Yes. I met him quite by accident in the steeple one day, and when he asked my name I told him. Then he said we must be cousins, for *his* name was Laferrière also. So, being cousins, we have fed the swallows together every day since. That is all."

The Countess exchanged a look with the curé, then she said :

"And you have told me nothing about this, Fifine."

"I would have done so," she answered, with great frankness; "I was not afraid to do it, only Honoré said there was no necessity for me to do so, unless you asked me, and then I was to speak the truth. You ask me now, and, you see, I tell you all."

"And his name is *really* Laferrière?" demanded the Countess.

"Yes."

"Where does he come from, and what is he doing here in St. Loup?"

"He lives in Paris, but he is spending his vacation with his grandfather, the Marquis de Campvallou, who lives about a league from here," said Fifine, much elated at the seeming effect of her words.

The Countess turned pale, and looked again at the curé. He, in turn, seemed much perplexed and distressed. Each divined the other's thoughts. Then, sinking into a chair by the window, she said:


"Leave us now, Father Joseph, and return by-and-by; we will then talk over this matter together."

The curé gravely rose, and took his departure.

"Toinette," he said, when he entered his little presbytère, "thou hast but one eye, but thou hast discovered and revealed to me this day one of God's most inscrutable providences."

The Countess, thoroughly alarmed as she thought of the possible consequences of this rencontre, forbade Fifine's ascending alone to the top of the cliff, and accompanied her thenceforth in all her walks to the village. Fifine, rebelling against this curtailment of her accustomed freedom, resolved, after a few days, to remain at home, and spent most of her time, thenceforth, in the garden.

She was there one afternoon throttling the boldest of the weeds, and trying to marshal the roses into some sort of order. But, with such a flower-mob as that, nothing so soft and delicate as her fingers could long contend, and she threw herself headlong at last into the grass. She lay there for some time, rolling over now and then to escape the fluffy coronal of a dandelion, and turning again as she felt a spire of timothy brushing her ear; now counting the wrinkles in that great, beetling



forehead of a cliff, and wondering whether anybody had ever stumbled over its edge, and how, if they had, into what particular spot in the garden they had fallen.

With that she sat up and measured the cliff with her eyes. A perpendicular wall, with a single indentation near the top, which was filled with soil, and where a few stunted bushes lived a precarious life—a sheer descent of full two hundred feet.

She shuddered at the idea of anybody's falling like that into the garden, and dismissing the terrible thought, peered up for the nineteenth or twentieth time that afternoon at the steeple-top. This time, however, she saw something move in the belfry—saw a flock of birds whirling about the windows, and soon—there could be no doubt about it—a handkerchief waved from that steeple-top. She was on her feet, and in a terrible flutter instantly. She put up her hand telescope-fashion, and actually stood on her tip-toes, to try to get a better view; then, as the handkerchief kept waving, she swung her hat, by its ribbon, about her head, like a catherine-wheel, with one hand, and gesticulated wildly

with the other. A greater flutter than ever then followed from the steeple, and then ceased entirely. She waited a long time for its reappearance, and was about to remove her eyes from the spot, when a stone fell softly in the grass by her side. She picked it up quickly, and found it wrapped in a piece of white paper, and attached to a cord which hung from the edge of the cliff. She tore the paper open and read :

“DEAR COUSIN FIFINE,

“I have fed the swallows every day, seeing that you would not come ; I could not let them starve ; I think, however, by the chatter they make over it, that they miss you very much. I won't say whether I share the birds' feelings or not, for I am very angry with you, for never coming to see me any more, you who are to be my wife. Did that cross old curé have anything to do with it ? He frowns dreadfully at me, when I meet him, but he has a very kind servant, her name is Toinette, she is not a bit pretty ; I imagine she must have been struck by lightning when she was young (do you remember that *awful*

awful thunder shower up in the steeple, Fifine?), but I think if you *could* manage to come up, she would be very kind to us. She and I in fact have become great friends, she gives me the curé's bread for the swallows.

"Write an answer, and tie it to a stone with the cord I shall drop with this. Then give the cord a twitch, and I will pull it up to the top. I wish I dared creep to the edge and get a look at you, but it is all cracked and rotten there—and I am afraid it would not be a safe thing to do.

"Ever your devoted cousin,

"HONORÉ."

How Fifine's heart fluttered! How the hot blood leaped to her face, tingling up to her very ears. Ah! young love! young love! Spring violets are sweeter than July roses. The god-smiths of Greece were wise in their generation. Think of Cupid middle-aged, with dyed whiskers, and crows' feet about his eyes!

There was a blank space at the bottom of the note, and Fifine chanced to have a pencil in her pocket! that was a veritable *trouvaille*!

she could now write a hasty answer and attach it to the cord—if—and she glanced apprehensively at all the windows, if Mère Pleure-tout were not watching her—but she was not—*a la bonne heure !*

So she quickly wrote :

“ DEAR COUSIN HONORÉ,

“ The stone came down all right, and I am glad you feed the swallows. You must not be angry with me. They won't let me come to the cliff any more. If *I* were you I should come right down, and *insist* on seeing me. You are fourteen, that is pretty old after all, and you should not be afraid.

“ Ever yours,

“ FIFINE.”

This done, she wrapped it about the stone, adjusted the cord, and gave it a twitch. In an instant it began to move across the grass, and got entangled in a rose-bush, from which she promptly extricated it, then it bounded against the wall of the cliff, and went dangling all the way up, and at last disappeared over the edge. She waited some time

to see if an answer would come, and at last, thinking that he might act upon her suggestion, she ran with something like trepidation into the house. She had hardly reached the salon, where the Countess had just taken a seat by the window, when the bell rang violently in the Court yard. Clichette, hastening from the kitchen to answer the summons, opened the wicket in the gate, and found herself confronted by a boyish face, with great round black eyes, and parted red lips, from which the words in a peremptory tone, at once burst forth :

“ Inform your mistress that Honoré de Laferrière desires to have an interview with her at once.”

“ Good Lord !” cried Clichette ; “ where is he then ?”

“ Here ! I am Honoré de Laferrière, open the gate quickly.”

Clichette looked up enquiringly at the window of the salon, where the Countess, who had heard every word of the conversation, was sitting ; and receiving an affirmative nod, the bolt was drawn, and M. Honoré was admitted into the court.

A moment later, he paused on the threshold of the salon, bowed respectfully to the Countess, then advancing to where Fifine, with a fluttering bosom and a very red face, was pretending to be absorbed in a book, he extended his hand and said :

“How do you do, Cousin Fifine?”

“What a handsome and well-bred boy!” thought the Countess to herself, secretly amused at his self-possession.

When Fifine had stammered something in reply, he said, turning toward the Countess ;

“I have the honour, I believe, of addressing Madame Pleuretout.”

“You have,” she answered, motioning him to a chair.

“My name is Honoré de Laferrière. My father is the Marquis de Laferrière, who lives in the Rue de Grenelle in Paris ; and I called to learn why Fifine did not come to the church as usual. I may as well say, madame, that we have been in the habit of feeding the swallows together.”

“Yes, M. Honoré, I learned through Father Joseph of these meetings. They were dis-

continued on Fifine's part by my express wish and command."

"I am sorry, madame ; there was no harm in them," he began.

"Permit me to remind you, M. Honoré," she interrupted ; "that it is not thought decorous or becoming in France for young girls like Fifine to have *rendezvous* with young gentlemen at the tops of steeples."

"I know it, madame," he promptly answered, "but since Fifine and I are to be married, it is but just and proper, I think, that we should see each other occasionally."

"Married !" cried the Countess, breathless with astonishment ; and turning sharply round to Fifine, she asked :

"What does this mean, Fifine. What do you know of marriage ?"

Fifine raised her head slowly. It was as red as a peony.

"Very little indeed," she answered ; "but I should like to know all about it I think. Honoré and I are quite agreed about it. It is all settled."

Did the Countess, at that moment, think of the blue-eyed boy lover, from whom she

had parted by the brook-side in her father's garden, long years ago? Possibly! At all events, the anger died out of her face. She looked at the brave, manly little fellow, with his fair open countenance, and his honest black eyes, in which shone no guile, and she shook her head sadly.

"My boy," she said; "it seems foolish for me to talk seriously of such a subject—for you are both but children."

"But we are to wait—we are not to marry each other all at once," interposed Fifine, with a gasp of deep anxiety.

The Countess shook her head again, and added: "Were you both of a proper age—were there no obstacles to such a union—were you even to obtain *my* consent, which is extremely doubtful, there would still be necessary the consent of others impossible to obtain. M. le Marquis—your father, would never permit you to wed this little Fifine of mine."

"I shall ask him at all events, and at once," said Honoré determinedly.

"And he will refuse."

"Then I shall disobey him, and run away with Fifine."

The Countess started up, her eyes all in a blaze of anger, and seized him by the arm.

"You would do *what*?" she cried. "You would run away with my Fifine? Come now, young man, this is too much; I thought better of you. I was beginning, in fact, to think quite well of you, but that destroys my good opinion at once. Run away! And would you do such a thing, Fifine? See here!" she said going over and taking Fifine by the shoulders. "Do you know that I could see you die first? That I would kill you myself, before I would permit such a thing to happen? Good-morning, M. Honoré," she continued, turning round to him again; "resume your occupation of bird-feeding by yourself. You shall not see Fifine again, and upon the first appearance of anything like disobedience on her part, I shall take her hundreds of miles from here, and where no De Laferrière shall ever find her."

Fifine was thoroughly frightened. She had never seen her grandmother in such a stormy mood before. She caught hold of her arm and said, with a face full of entreaty:

"But, grandmamma, I wouldn't run away

if he wanted me to do so. I am afraid my mother did that; and that may be why she is not with me now."

"Who told you that?" exclaimed the Countess, her anger now gaining its climax. "Did this young gentleman give that information to you?"

"I assure you, madame," said Honoré warmly, "I know nothing of Fifine's mother. I know not—you know possibly far better than I—whether we are related at all. The similarity of the name, led me to call her cousin. I know not, in reality, whether I have a cousin or not—I have never heard or known of any. I had an uncle, but my father never mentions his name in my presence, and I assume that he is dead. Pardon me for saying what I did, I am but a boy, as you say, and spoke from impulse. I would not do such a thing. My father never refuses any of my requests, and I feel sure that he will permit me to marry Fifine. I shall ask him at once. Until I do so, madame and mademoiselle, adieu."

With that he turned and walked out at the door.

Fifine burst into a torrent of tears. The Countess stood dumbfounded. When he had gone, she reconsidered her harshness, and watched him with admiring interest as he crossed the court to the outer gate.

"Surely the ways of God *are* inscrutable," she thought to herself many times during the day.

CHAPTER VI.

SEPARATION.

A FEW days afterwards, Fifine was permitted to visit the village alone. She had not entered Jeannette's cottage for many a long day, and she reproached herself for it; knowing that that little mite of a Jeannot, with whom she had had so many romps before she met Honoré, would miss her sorely. So she spent an hour in the cottage, brightening it as a sunbeam might, and then espying the doctor hanging over his garden gate, she paid him a visit too, and went chattering with the good man through his flower-beds, and came away at last with an apron full of purple grapes. Then she started on her way homeward. She walked meditatively along be-

tween the hedgerows, stopping now and then to pick a flower, or listen to the twitter of birds in the branches. At last she came to where a road-mender was seated with his hammer, beside a heap of stones. There was a sort of rhythm in the swinging hammer, and a delight in watching the fire-sparkles leap from the smitten flint, that determined her to rest a few minutes there within sight and hearing of it all. So she threw herself upon the grass, in the shadow of the hedge, with a poplar standing just behind her like a great green-liveried flunkey, opened her apron, and sat eating her grapes and watching, with such intentness, the movements of the road-mender, that she did not at first perceive a long shadow creeping past; not in fact until a tall gentleman stood right in front of her. He was very dark and handsome, with close-cut hair and beard—iron-grey in colour—and eyes that had the quality of looking through and through you.

A grape that was on its way to Fifine's mouth, dropped suddenly into her lap; she blushed, and was about to rise in some confusion, when he said :

"Do not let me disturb you, mademoiselle; I only wished to inquire if you could direct me to the house where Mère Pleuretout lives?"

She let fall the corners of her apron, and the grapes went tumbling out upon the grass. Her eyes were so wide open, and fixed so earnestly on his face, that a smile appeared an instant at the corners of his mouth;—an instant only, for it was a very stern look that this stranger wore.

"Mère Pleuretout! you said Mère Pleuretout, did you not?" she asked softly.

"Yes, mademoiselle. Can you tell me where she lives?"

"Oh yes! certainly." She started up all in a pant, and pointed to the house on the hill. "There it is, monsieur, the stone one, under the cliff; there is a gate in the wall."

He looked attentively at her a moment; then, with a few words of thanks, passed on.

She sank back into the grass from the sheer force of surprise, as from a concussion.

"Who was he? What did he want?"

Could it be Honoré's father come to give his consent to their marriage?"

The long shadow went creeping upwards; the tall form disappeared behind an angle in the hedgerow. She heard the tinkle of a distant bell, and she knew that he had entered the old house. Oh! how fast the cobwebs of perplexity grew in her little head, entangling all her thoughts and her very perceptions, and senses, too, it would appear, for she heard no longer the clang of the roadmender's hammer, or saw the bright fire leap from the riven stones.

"What *could* it mean but that Honoré's father had come with glad tidings to both their hearts? Ah, yes! that surely was the meaning of it all," and she stooped and gathered up the fallen grapes once more into her apron.

Meanwhile, the tall, dark man, admitted at the house of Mère Pleuretout, had been shown into the salon, where the window was that overlooked the garden.

The Countess turned very white at first when Clichette handed her the card bearing the name of the Marquis de Laferrière. She

had not seen him for nearly sixteen years. Their last meeting had been a painful one. He, at that time, had uttered a prophecy, of which her present secluded life was but a too full realisation. His presence opened the graves of too many bitter memories, and she would have gladly avoided the meeting. But hers was not the nature to shrink from this or any other encounter, where there was urgent need for it, as in the present juncture.

She entered the salon at once.

The Marquis, seated by the window, and gazing abstractedly up at the church on the cliff, failed to perceive her until she stood at his very side, and said :

“ To what, M. le Marquis, am I indebted for the honour of this visit ? ”

The familiar voice fell upon his ears like the sound of some old melody, but dimly remembered ; he turned quickly, started to his feet, and for one moment hesitated. Then a flush mounted to his temples, and he asked :

“ Is it possible that I am addressing the Countess de Rauville ? ”

"A moment ago," she answered, "I should have deemed our meeting again in this world an utter impossibility. Such an event, however, has come to pass. You have said it. I am the Countess de Rauville. Be seated, monsieur."

He was too much astonished to at once reply. For the second time in his life, perhaps, he was truly embarrassed. Once before, in an old house in the Rue de Picpus, this thing had happened to him, through meeting a De Rauville thus face to face. In all of which there clearly was a strange fatality, he reflected, as he resumed his chair in obedience to the Countess's command. She was the first to speak again.

"I thought, M. le Marquis, that my seclusion was an impenetrable one to the world. How did you succeed in obtaining my address?"

"I expected to meet Madame Pleuretout, and *not* the Countess de Rauville," he answered, "and my surprise and confusion at the mistake I have made are, I am sure, apparent to you, madame."

"In St. Loup I am known simply as Mère Pleuretout," she answered quietly.

At these words the look of perplexity disappeared from his features, and one of suspicion took its place. His brow darkened, and every suppressed line in the grim and time-bitten face at once reappeared.

"So, then, the mystery is solved," he began, in a sarcastic tone, when she suddenly interrupted him.

"Mystery, monsieur! What do you mean by mystery?" and her eyes flashed.

He hesitated a moment before he answered.

"You are doubtless aware," he then said, "that I married a certain Mademoiselle de Campvallon."

The Countess turned very white, and bit her lips.

"In view of the fact," she said, "that before one wedding-feast was fairly cold in my own house, you insulted me with an invitation to another, I can scarcely fail to recall the circumstance you have been good enough to mention."

It was clear that he was greatly disconcerted by her words.

"Really, madame," he stammered, "such a

thing could not have been intentional, I assure you."

"Let it pass. It was years ago, and I have long since buried the memory of it with many other dead resentments. Continue, M. le Marquis; you were married to Mademoiselle de Campvallon. Just so, and *après?*"

"*Après!*" and he raised his eyebrows, and looked hard at the Countess. "Well, afterwards, a child was born."

"A son, I know, and his name is Honoré. By some strange chance he has fallen in love with your brother's daughter, and your object in calling upon Mère Pleuretout is to make inquiries as to this little girl Fifine, is it not so? Let us abbreviate all histories, M. le Marquis, and come at once to the point."

"It is exactly as you say," he answered; "though her relationship to my brother has been, until now, a mere question of surmise to me. I thought the child was in a convent at Paris. Have you become reconciled, then, to your daughter, madame?"

"No."

"How did the child come into your possession?"

"Through the mediation of the Vicomte d'Harmontal, who acted upon my daughter's instructions."

"Always the Vicomte!" he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Why not then? It would appear that when *we* forsook her, she found in him a sturdy friend. It is but natural that she should repay him in confidences."

"It is a long time, madame, since we last met. You have at least *seen* your daughter during the interval, of course?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"No, monsieur," she answered; "I give you credit for much acumen. Since the day you uttered your doleful prophecies, I have never seen her face."

"I was scarcely prepared to hear this, madame, though I foresaw the consequences of your obduracy. May I be permitted, then, to ask where she has been during this long period?"

"You are inquisitive for an indifferent man," she answered quickly, "but you are quite welcome to whatever information I possess as to her movements. She has

become an opera-singer. Declining to accept a single sou of her own money, she has, I am told, amassed a fortune in her profession. She has become famous throughout the world, and you have doubtless often heard of her under another name. She has sung, I believe, in every capital in Europe, with the exception of Paris ; there, for obvious reasons, she will never consent to appear."

"Ah ! yes ; I understand," he said, after a moment's reflection. "A friend in London, who knew your daughter by sight, spoke to me several years since of the strong resemblance existing between the latter and ——, who was then performing at Covent Garden Theatre. Remembering Madame de Laferrière's proficiency in music, I went, the next evening, to the opera-house, and found that the season had closed. Then, thinking it but a coincidence, or the fancy of a man whom I knew to be near-sighted, I dismissed the whole matter from my mind."

As the Countess did not at once reply, he added :

"She, I suppose, has been quite alone in her wanderings ?"

"Always!"—This in a rising key.

"She has never lived with *him*?"

"Your brother?"

"Yes, madame, my brother."

"*Never*! and I am astounded at your asking such a question. Until the millennium comes, will lambs, of their own accord, lie down with wolves? Will doves consort with adders? I know not by what jugglery your brother won my daughter, but I know, too well, the temper of the De Rauville blood, to believe that he has profited much by his bargain."

And the Countess rose and paced the floor excitedly. At last she faced round and said:

"Have you any further questions to ask, Monsieur de Laferrière?"

He coloured slightly, and answered:

"About this Fifine; she came to you, you say, through the mediation of——"

"Of a true and brave gentleman, yes," she interposed hotly.

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"Come now, M. de Laferrière, let us end this at once, and approach the object of your visit without further circumlocution or delay.

By some mysterious providence, your child and my daughter's child have been thrown together, and have learned to love each other. Of course, under present circumstances, it is your wish that nothing should come out of it;—that, if needs be, they must be kept apart."

"You spare me the necessity of appearing harsh. You have certainly well defined my wish," he answered.

"And I may therefore safely assume that, under no possible conjuncture of circumstances, will you modify your decision," she pursued.

"You may," he replied. "I could not so readily forget old injuries, madame."

"Indeed! I suspected as much," she answered bitterly. "You are made of adamant, Monsieur de Laferrière."

"I have never disguised that fact from you, madame."

"And you would not relent," she pursued, "though the very stars fell at your feet upon an errand of mercy."

"Hyperbole, madame," he interposed with a smile.

"No figure of speech would be extravagant," she retorted, "where it was a question of your unforgiving nature. Do you not think we have, all of us, sufficiently suffered by this time, M. de Laferrière?"

"Must I remind you, madame," he retorted, "that your present life is, in many respects, an expiation of the harsh treatment to which you subjected an erring, but possibly repentant child."

"Generous man!" she answered, with flashing eyes. "It is just as you say; but mine was the harshness of a few weeks only, and inspired mainly by the thought that *you* had sustained an injury at her hands. At any time during these fifteen long and bitter years, I would have given my heart's blood to clasp her once more in my arms and hear her say that she had forgiven me. But as for you, M. de Laferrière, your resentment is perennial and undying. With a means at hand, you care neither to heal the ulcers in your own heart, nor to mitigate the sorrow of a long-suffering mother, who incurred all she has endured in the effort to make you a suitable reparation for her child's sinful folly."

“I fear you are right, madame,” he answered, setting his lips closely together. “Your daughter has had abundant time to vindicate herself, were she in a position to do so. Many a night, even as my wife lay asleep in my arms, have I prayed that such a thing might come to pass. But my supplications to that end have never been answered; while they continue so, though I cherish her image still as she once was, as something inestimably precious, I shall never give my sanction to such a form of atonement as you have been good enough to suggest to me to-day.”

“Now look you here, Monsieur de Laferrière,” said the Countess, rising to her feet, “this interview is becoming an exceedingly painful one to me, and I need scarcely apologise for bringing it at once to a close; but I wish first to give you a word of friendly warning against the possible consequences of your obduracy. You are human like the rest of us, and may have greatly erred in your deductions, and in view of the fact that all this misery has come from a member of the house of Laferrière, I am inclined to dispute

your right to pronounce the arbitrary judgment you have pronounced upon my daughter's act. You are the last actor in this fine trilogy of pride. My part in it was soon played. My daughter, they assure me, is weary of the *rôle*. Yours, however, you would prolong indefinitely if you could. But it will not be so. I feel, I almost know, that the time is near when you, like the rest of us, will be brought low and humiliated. Do not, I entreat you, needlessly aggravate the suffering of those bitter hours by the recollection of to-day's harshness. There seems the hand of Providence in the loves of these children, and through their union many long festering wounds might be healed. I do not ask, I only suggest. Reflect once more before you say the final word."

The Marquis was silent one moment, then he picked up his hat and answered as he rose :

"I have already expressed my wishes in this matter, and I see no reason, madame, why I should change my opinion. The children must be separated at once. Honoré shall accompany me to Paris to-morrow."

A loud cry, like that of a wounded bird, at this moment filled the room.

They turned, both of them, and saw at the door a white terrified face, doubly ghastly from its being a child's face, which quickly disappeared as they turned.

Poor Fifine had been listening, until—her heart fairly breaking with grief—she could endure it no longer.

The image of the little trim figure in the grass uprose in the Marquis's mind.

"Ah! I thought as much," he sighed to himself as he took his departure.

The next day the Marquis de Laferrière and his son quitted Campvallon. The nature of the interview between them, when the father announced his decision, may be safely left to the imagination of the reader. Fifine was free now to climb into the steeple and renew her companionship with the birds and the bells; but, alas! her interest in them had ceased. With the coming of the cool autumnal nights, her heart grew cold and weary too.

"Oh! dear Mother," she would say, kneel-

ing at the shrine of Our Lady, "I am so tired of waiting for Honoré. Do send him back to me soon again! We have never vexed you, sweet Mother. It is all his father's fault, he is so very cruel; and oh! Mother, if you will only soften his heart and make him see that there can be no harm in Honoré's loving Fifine—little Fifine—that is *me*, Mother dear—Honoré and I, when we are married, will buy you two silver candlesticks ever so much bigger than the ones Viquey gave you."

CHAPTER VII.

MICHAUD REDIVIVUS.

NOVEMBER set in with chilling winds and beating rains ; with brief blazing noons, damped by the fogs that came with the sun's setting. The trees were stripping to meet the shock of equinoctial gales ; dead leaves flew capering everywhere in quest of shelter ; the nights drew on apace, the days were tardy in waking ; midnight became a far-off time from the coming and the going of the light ; the wolves made forays from the mountains ; the steam of burning logs ascended from many a ruddy hearth ; sharp breathings came now and then from the Pole.

Paris, defiant, lighted its candles, kindled its fires, and laughed from its million blazing

windows just as it has ever laughed at all the elements.

The Quartier St. Germain awoke from its summer sleep.

Splendid equipages now mingled with the fiacres and the water-carts in the Rue Vanneau. Sergents-de-ville, at last, saw lights gleaming in the hôtel of the Vicomte d'Harmontal, saw the well-known greys dashing out of the gate, and relaxed their vigilance by night.

The Vicomte, in truth, had been long absent from Paris. The cause of it may be easily conjectured by the reader. Marie had been singing with great success in the Austrian capital. The echoes of her triumph had long since reached her native city, and the Salle Ventadour held out its arms and beckoned her home. But in the midst of it all, while the enthusiasm was still hot, and the plaudits were yet in the air, there came a sudden blank, an obscurity as it were of the sun, and it became known far and wide that she had fallen prostrate and fainting before the footlights. Doctors held grave consultations at her bedside the next day. "Cerebral excitement;" "waste of nervous

force ;" " she had cried too many real tears upon the stage of late ;" all this quoth the doctors.

Ah ! and too true was it. The marble had all worn down to the woman's heart. Ragged and threadbare had become that garment of pride. Comforting had been the Vicomte's narrative of her child's—her *Fifine's* beauty and gentleness—of the mother's grief and solitude, sweetened only by the golden fruit of that guilty love. Remorse ate like a canker into her sleep. Her dreams were a wild delirium ; baby-faces crowded about her like the manifold reflections of a prism. " Oh ! dear God ! if I could see them but once more !" she thought.


" Emotional excitement," said the doctors, and bulletins were posted to that effect upon that Austrian Opera-house ; and hisses were hurled at the substitute who did her best, but who never could be to the people what Marie was. Then her name dropped from the announcements altogether, and messengers went far and wide to secure some one who could adequately fill her place, for she could no longer sing.

The Vicomte soon learned of this, as a matter of course, and all the winds of heaven could not have swept him from his purpose of flying to her.

Ah ! with what a sad mingling of joy and sorrow she greeted him—lover, brother, father—a trinity rarely met in man !

To him she quickly unburdened her heart ; it could no longer endure the strain of that long, long agony. There was no weakness yet toward him—no relenting from the inexorable conditions of her marriage-bond—oh no ! but her child—this darling little Fifine—this patient long-expecting mother. Ah ! yes ; at last she would see them—would fly to them ; for if her disease *should* prove fatal in that far-off Austrian city, where Consuelo sang, how could she endure the agony of closing her eyes upon that uncompleted hope—the hope which had been as the savour of salt to all these bitter later years !

Yes, yes ; when she was a little better, perhaps by the Christmas-time—when Fifine should be sixteen—she would try and be strong enough to return to her beloved ones.



When, in fact, she became much better, the Vicomte was forced to leave her, to return to Paris upon some urgent business connected with his mother's estate.

A dark, lowering November day greeted him upon his arrival. How cold and dreary appeared the sumptuous apartment in that hôtel in the Rue Vanneau! It did not seem like home to him; home now to him was only where *she* was.

Bernard, who had usually accompanied his master upon his journeyings, had remained behind upon this occasion. Never was valet more delighted when he heard the Vicomte's well-known voice in the court that November day. A smile, perpetual like Gwynplaine's, hovered about his face. At last, when he had made everything as comfortable as he could for his master, and had answered all his questions, he said :

"By the way, a curious-looking man has been inquiring for you almost daily, M. le Vicomte."

"Had he a bill, Bernard?" asked D'Harmontal, laughing.

"Oh no! we are not much troubled by

that sort of people, M. le Vicomte. This was a seedy and dilapidated-looking old fellow, with eyes as green as the grass."

"Ha! yes! I know; when he comes again, Bernard, admit him at once."

At that moment the bell in the court tinkled. Bernard quitted the room.

"That must be Michaud!" said the Vicomte thoughtfully. "He has then returned. I wonder what is in the wind now?"

"The man with the green eyes is here, M. le Vicomte; shall I show him up?" said Bernard suddenly appearing at the door.

"By all means, and at once," replied the Vicomte.

Michaud—it *was* Michaud—was dilapidated enough in all conscience. Everything was faded about him except his eyes; they were of a fast colour. Even his face had taken on a hue, and became a dirty yellow, like old parchment, or unwashed linen; three of his front teeth had gone; and altogether he presented an appearance, beside which the *Diable Boiteux* would have been comely and alluring.

"Well, my peripatetic friend," said the Vicomte. "America doesn't appear to agree with you."

"New York is a Sahara in summer, and, they tell me, a Spitzbergen in winter," said Michaud, grinning; "and upon the whole, I think I prefer the climate of France."

"Umph! Well! have you seen him? *that* is the point."

The Vicomte was never circuitous in important matters; he broke from conventional paths, and went straight across the fields to the end he had in view.

"Yes, M. le Vicomte," said Michaud.

"Have you obtained any clue to the marriage-certificate?"

"Yes, he had it in his possession."

"*Mille diables!* And you got it, of course?"

"No, I did not."

"What did I pay you to go to America for, —say!"

"To find out what I could, and obtain whatever fortune threw in my way."

"Well! but you didn't obtain the marriage-certificate?"

"But I found out that it exists, and is in his possession—that is something. I learned still more important things than that however, M. le Vicomte."

"Well, what are they?"

"M. le Vicomte, I am excessively poor; I have but five francs left in the world," said Michaud, with great apparent humility.

"I see," said D'Harmontal, pulling out his purse, and placing a bank-note for one hundred francs into Michaud's hand. "It is bad to be so destitute, it makes one reticent. Now, speak."

"Thank you, M. le Vicomte. I was on the point of saying that M. de Laferrière is coming home, and that he would probably arrive in France during the month of December."

"He will be afraid to return, for fear of arrest," said the Vicomte thoughtfully.

"Oh no. Now that the Monarchy has fallen, we live, M. le Vicomte, at present, under a Republic; and a general amnesty to political offenders, I would say, subject to your correction, has been proclaimed."

"Humph!" ejaculated the Vicomte reflectively, passing his hands through his hair.

"Besides," continued Michaud, "he now possesses certain rights which he intends to assert."

"Rights! What the devil do you mean?"

"I am very poor, M. le Vicomte. I already have contracted debts far in excess of the one hundred francs you have so graciously given me," said Michaud with a bow, that made a fresh rent in his somewhat airy apparel.

The Vicomte immediately took another note from his pocket-book and gave him.

"There, horse-leech; it won't do to let your credit suffer in that way I suppose. Now tell me what *are* these rights?"

"If he can find his wife and child, as he purposes to do," said Michaud, "he maintains that he has a legal claim upon both which he will at once enforce, especially as regards the child. He is, I think, afraid of the wife."

"Oh—yes—I see."

"He prefers to strike *her* through the child; do you understand?"

"Perfectly," said the Vicomte, after some

reflection. "And you may now go, Michaud. Call again to-morrow. I retain you, for the present, in my service. Remember! to those who are faithful to my interests, I am always liberal."

As Michaud was leaving the room, the Vicomte suddenly turned and added:

"I have something more to say to you. Shut the door and sit down."

Michaud obeyed.

"I want you to tell me," continued D'Harmontal, "how this marriage-certificate, which was sent enclosed in a letter to the Marquis de Laferrière, came into the possession of his brother."

The nature of Michaud's complexion did not admit of his changing colour, but his eyes began to sparkle in a most disagreeable manner immediately.

"Ah!" he said, grinning and rubbing his gnarled and knotted hands together. "Ah! yes, that is indeed a mystery, M. le Vicomte."

"I don't think you understood what I said," answered D'Harmontal. "I know that it is a mystery, and I asked you to explain it. Proceed!"

Michaud, still grinning, shrugged his shoulders, and said :

"If it is your good pleasure, M. le Vicomte, to play the *rôle* of Sphinx, I might not have the good fortune to be an Œdipus."

"D—— your mythology! Answer my question!" said the Vicomte testily.

"There must be a very complicated lock to *that* mystery," pursued Michaud in his most unctuous manner; "and the finder of a key to fit it should be a very lucky man, M. d'Harmontal."

"You consider yourself a lucky man then, do you?"

"One never knows until he disposes of his commodities, whether he is a lucky man or not," said Michaud, with the same imperturbable smile.

"Well, tape-worm, how much then to disgorge yourself? Be quick, I am getting impatient!"

"I could use a thousand francs, monsieur,—"
Michaud began, when the Vicomte rose and pointed to the door.

"Crocodile! pike! be off with you! I discharge you on the spot," he cried.

"But," interposed Michaud, "I had not yet finished. I said I could *use* a thousand francs, and so I could, M. le Vicomte, to very great advantage ; but five hundred francs, I think, would meet all my present necessities."

"Ah, that is your price, is it? Well, out with your secret, then—and a precious piece of villainy I suspect it to be, too."

"Do you guarantee me then——"

"Out with it this instant, or I shall not give you a sou. Quick now, this is your last opportunity!" interrupted the Vicomte, fast losing his patience.

Michaud was still smiling.

"You will be angry with me, I know," he answered; "and I am sorry that I ever did anything to get Mdlle. de Rauville into trouble, but I hated the Marquis de Laferrière so much, that I did not reflect upon the amount of trouble the lady would be obliged to endure, when I revenged myself for the injuries I had received at his hands."

"Then she has to thank *you* for all these years of misery, and I pay five hundred francs for the privilege of learning it. *Pardieu!* this is amusing!"

"I am sorry for it, M. le Vicomte," said Michaud. "I had no ill feelings toward the lady, but I was filled with resentment against the Marquis; and when his brother sent for me on the 6th of June, to meet him at Auteuil, and he then revealed to me the scheme which was afterwards so successfully carried out, I entered into it at once without a single thought as to the consequences it would entail upon this poor lady."

"Ah!" said the Vicomte between his teeth; "what a help to one's conscience it is to be absent-minded! Go on!"

"Well! Madame de Laferrière came to the hôtel, to identify the body of her husband. I understood her motive perfectly well, of course, and verified it by listening at the door of the chamber in which the dead stranger lay. I heard her express her conviction as to his identity; heard the Marquis make a declaration of his love in an adjoining room—the room in which, concealed by a curtain, I was then sitting; and heard, finally, Madame de Laferrière promise to write to him on the morrow. I saw Henri de Laferrière that evening, and he engaged me to intercept her letter upon its

arrival and bring it to him. I did so. He opened it and retained it in his possession; he has it now, as well as the marriage-certificate. He then made a rough draft of a reply, and asked me to copy it. I did so, imitating as closely as possible the hand-writing of the original. He had one of the De Rauville seals in his possession, with which he fastened the letter, and in this condition I gave it to the Marquis on the following day. That is all!"

"What a precious scoundrel you are!" said the Vicomte; then opening a drawer in his desk, he took forth a sheet of paper and dipped a pen into his inkstand. "Here!" he said, looking up at Michaud, with two bright red spots upon his cheeks, "sit down and write that all out, and put your name at the bottom of it. Then you shall have your money."

Michaud did as he was commanded. The Vicomte read over the document when it was completed, and then counted out five hundred francs and placed them in Michaud's hands.

"Now, you green-eyed devil, get out of my sight as quickly as possible. I have had

enough of you for one day," he said, pointing to the door.

The following day he called upon a friend whose name had been forged by Henri de Laferrière for the sum of fifteen thousand francs, and together they visited the Prefecture of Police, where after making a formal complaint against Henri de Laferrière for forgery, and depositing the sum of five thousand francs, in addition to a small amount for advertising, the Vicomte obtained an important concession.

"We shall see about these legal rights of his," he said to himself, as he buttoned up his coat and shook the obliging Prefect (an intimate friend of his) by the hand and gained the street.

The next morning he went by train to Rouen, and thence to Saint Loup. He said nothing to the Countess of Marie's projected return, thinking the delights of a surprise to be preferable; but he made her fully acquainted with Henri's designs toward Fifine, and of the preventive measures he had adopted. With a final injunction as to vigilance, he at once returned to Paris. There

he found all the walls placarded with the following :

“ FIVE THOUSAND FRANCS REWARD,
For the arrest of Henri de Laferrière
On a charge of Forgery.”

Then followed a detailed and minute description of his person.

“ Legal rights, eh !” he chuckled. “ *Eh bien ! nous verrons.*”

CHAPTER VIII.

CONVERGING COURSES.

PERSONAL grievances—unless a woman is in the case—are, as a rule, easily smothered in gold. Michaud came from prison with a heart fairly swelling with a sense of injury against the Vicomte d'Harmental. The *bonhomie* and the purse of the latter, however, soon exerted a demulcent effect upon his more acrid feelings, and in the end gained the ascendancy over whatever thoughts of revenge he might, at one time, have entertained toward the Vicomte.

His mission to America might possibly have resulted differently, had Henri de Laferrière been in a position to pay for his services, and his capacity for concealing important secrets. Failing to handicap the

Vicomte in this respect, however, the victory seemed in a fair way to remain with the latter. At all events, the intelligence as to Henri's intentions proved to be correct. On the 17th of December he arrived at Havre from New York, and hastened with hot glee to Paris to assert his paternal rights. Confronted with the Vicomte's placards, however, and shrinking from the over-close scrutiny of hungry eyes eager for so plump a reward as five thousand francs, he abandoned the direct and more hazardous road, shaved his head, clapped on a black wig, ensconced as much as possible of his face in a pair of false whiskers, and adopted a very oblique course indeed to attain the end he had in view. Legal rights failing, stratagem would be all-sufficient, he thought. Men practically dead have an immense advantage, in this respect, over the living—in theory, at least—for the law of human chances being purely equitable, is never completely at the service of any one man. The problem was not altogether a difficult one, but in this case Michaud chanced to represent an unknown quantity wholly absent from Henri de Laferrière's thoughts.

He laid his plans well, being in no wise destitute of a certain amount of low cunning which is often mistaken for intelligence. He bribed one of the servants at the Hôtel de Rauville into revealing the Countess's address, and possessed of that, he found no difficulty in obtaining all the information he desired. He laughed to himself when he ascertained with what affection the Countess held the little Fifine—the little girl whom he should kidnap and carry to America with him.

“What a fat ransom the old woman will pay for her,” he said, chuckling to himself as he went to bed in the inn at Rouen the night of the 23rd of December—the night when, lying in *her* bed in the tower under the Cliff, Fifine whispered under the clothes :

“To-morrow, dear Mother, I shall be sixteen, and you will then send me back Honoré, I am sure. I have not forgotten about the silver candlesticks, and to-morrow night I shall burn a beautiful green candle at your feet in memory of that dear little Christ baby you had long, long ago—in a barn among the cattle, was it not, dear Mother ?”

It is a wonder that Henri did not per-

ceive Michaud dogging his footsteps as he prowled about the village of Saint Loup; but then, after all, it is only the self-conceited that are truly blind !

Marie de Laferrière resolved, in spite of the injunctions and commands of her physician, to brave the dangers of a journey to France. She arrived at Paris on the 22nd, and on the following day proceeded to Rouen. The Vicomte, intent on following the movements of Henri de Laferrière, was unable to accompany her.

But rest assured, reader, at this critical moment he was not far behind.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PHANTOM IN THE HEDGEROW.

THE morning of the 24th broke clear and cold. Snow lay upon the ground ; the air was full of stinging nettles ; the hedges were hoary with rime ; the poplars assumed the guise of powdered footmen ; the sun had lost its gold, and burned incandescent in a frosty sky ; icicles hung about the lips of the village fountain ; the snow, where it melted the night before, had been trampled into corrugated steel by the *sabots* of the village folk ; here and there straw had been thrown that old men's bones might not be broken in falling.

By ten o'clock the café had pulled up its red blinds, furbished up its billiard balls, and suspended from the ceiling a sprig or two of

something green, and otherwise prepared for the thin trickle of custom which came with the Christmas-time. When the waiter—a heavy-handed lout whose face was a perfect constellation of freckles—had wiped his brow after the unwonted exertion, and had adjusted his forelock in the mirror, he sat down complacently by the window and wondered once more who the strange gentleman could have been who visited the café the evening before. A gentleman with blue eyes and black hair and beard (the waiter had never in all his days seen such a curious combination as *that* before)—a jolly fellow too, who had been in America and all sorts of queer places, and had such an extraordinary knack in making *carroms*. Well! it did seem to the waiter that the balls only had to be whistled to by him like trained canaries, and they came and went obedient to his will.

In the midst of his reflections, the latch of the door was raised, and the strange gentleman entered. The disguise was an admirable one; perhaps but for the eyes, and the mere suggestion of a cicatrice beneath the meshes

of the false beard, we should not have recognised Henri de Laferrière at all.

He nodded to the waiter, and approaching the billiard-table, was about to take a cue in his hand when the latch rattled again, and a man entered who, after blowing upon his fingers and wiping the frost from his beard, seated himself at a table and ordered a glass of hot wine.

He was evidently a peasant, poorly dressed, and to all appearances a sort of under-gardener or labourer. When the waiter had left the room in order to heat the wine, he pulled a letter from his pocket, held it at a distance from his face, cocked his head on one side and surveyed it in a helplessly perplexed manner.

"Madame Pleuretout!" he said musingly. "And what will Madame Pleuretout say if it falls into *her* possession?"

Here the billiard-balls suddenly ceased to click. Henri de Laferrière turned sharply round, surveyed the new-comer intently a moment, then laying down his cue he stepped to his side.

"My friend, that letter seems to trouble

you," he said, with a smile that brought every one of his white teeth into full view.

The man turned—looked up—saw the smile, and was reassured.

"Yes, monsieur," he answered. "I have walked a league—all the way from Campvallon—to deliver this letter; and now that I am here, I don't know how to do it;" here he extended the letter, upon which Henri read :

"To be given to Mademoiselle Fifine, at Mère Pleuretout's, in the old house under the Cliff at Saint Loup."

"Whew! what is all this? some love affair, eh?" asked Henri with sudden exultation.

"*Je n'en sais rien moi,*" replied the man. "It is from young Honoré—my master—the Marquis de Campvallon's grandson. He came to me early this morning and said: 'Pierre, here is a bright new five-franc piece of the Republic; it is all for you if you will go to Saint Loup with this letter, and find some means of placing it into the young lady's hands. She has golden hair and blue eyes,

and her name is Fifine, and somebody'—whose name I have forgotten—'in the presbytère on the cliff will aid you; but for your life do not let it fall into Madame Pleuretout's hands!' It all seemed easy enough when I started out, but now that I am here I do not exactly see how I am going to accomplish it after all."

Henri affected to explode with laughter.

"Oh! I pity *you*," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Me! Why, then?"

"For attempting to circumvent that she-devil, my friend. Why, do you know," he added, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper, "that she is a Spaniard, with a beard an inch long, and that she carries a dagger in her belt, which she has sworn to bury in the first man who attempts to see Mademoiselle Fifine, her daughter?"

"Holy saints!" cried Pierre, aghast. "I will have no more to do with the letter."

"What, then, will you do with it?"

"Take it back, of course."

"Monsieur Honoré did not give you the

five francs for that ; you should do whatever you have been paid for doing."

Pierre scratched his head in dire perplexity.

"That is so," he said ruefully.

"Oh ! I know all about *her*," said Henri, taking Pierre's dilemma promptly by the horns. "She is an aunt of mine, you see."

With the eagerness of the proverbial drowning man, Pierre clutched at that straw.

"Then surely you can aid me," he said.

"Oh ! I don't know ; it would be too perilous ; the old lady is already suspicious of me."

Here the waiter appeared with the hot wine. As he assumed a listening attitude, with his apron thrown togawise across his arm, Henri at once ordered another glass for himself.

"It would relieve my mind so much if you *could* aid me," said Pierre, when our highly-freckled Ganymede was out of hearing.

"But it is a serious affair, I tell you," rejoined Henri, with the air of a man who smelt danger in the wind.

"So much the more need have I then of assistance."

"No! no! don't ask me, you must accomplish it yourself. I could show you an ugly scar on my arm, my friend, which that dagger made about a year ago; I only attempted to kiss my little cousin, that was all. *Pardieu!* one scar like that is quite sufficient."

"Please! please! monsieur——"

"If you did not appear to be such a good, honest fellow, I should laugh at you."

"Ah! if you only would take the letter for me."

"But suppose I get into trouble! You, with your five francs safely in your pocket, do not reflect upon that."

"Please! monsieur, please!"

"Well then, give it to me. Confound your persistence, and my good-nature, which will be the ruin of me yet."

Henri paid for all the wine, and Pierre, with his heart warm with gratitude, shook him cordially by the hand. They left the *café* together, and at the junction of the main street with the post-road they separated, Henri walking in the direction of the cliff.

When he was alone, he broke the seal of the letter, and read :

“DEAR COUSIN FIFINE,

“ I have run away from Paris just to see you once more. Do not be afraid of the bearer, he is an honest fellow. Arrange with him about meeting me on the cliff, and send me word at what hour I must be there.

“ Your devoted

“ HONORÉ.”

Henri de Laferrière turned back at once, and ran for a few hundred yards; when Pierre's retreating figure came in sight, he shouted at the top of his voice.

Pierre paused, looked behind him, and retraced his steps. When they were within speaking distance, Henri said :

“ You must take some message back, of course. Simply say ten o'clock to-morrow. I will arrange it.”

Pierre was once more profuse in his thanks, and they separated again.

Just about dusk the same day, Fifine was returning from a walk to Jeannette's cottage

by the brookside. Veils of mist were already drifting up the valley. A stain as of blood lay upon the ridge of the western hills ; then a glow like a blush upon a young girl's cheek mounted to the zenith, and Fifine saw among the gaunt branches of an elm a thousand foliations, as in some grand cathedral window.

By the time she had climbed midway to the cliff, the darkness fell headlong upon her. She had not intended to remain so late ; Mère Pleuretout would certainly be anxious, and for the first time, perhaps, in her life, the fear and the consciousness that came with her sixteen years impelled her to accelerate her speed, and glance nervously at the black hedgerows. Suddenly she paused in dismay, as a man's voice proceeded from a clump of bushes almost at her very side.

"Are you Fifine ?" it said.

Her first impulse was to gather up her skirts and flee in hot haste ; she was about to do this when the voice said :

"Stop ! stop ! I come from Honoré. Are you Fifine, or not ?"

"Yes, yes," she answered, all in a flutter.

If her feet had been locked fast by the

frost, she could not have more completely lost the control of her limbs.

A head now appeared over the top of the hedge ; she could see very little of it in the closing darkness, but the voice was friendly and reassuring.

“ Honoré has sent you a letter—here it is,” and an arm was extended across the hedge.

Her limbs became lissom and supple enough now. With a single bound she reached the spot and snatched the letter from his hands.

She could not decipher its contents, but in the dying light she saw that it resembled another writing, which at that moment lay snug and warm upon her fluttering heart.

“ He has returned, and will be here to-night,” pursued the voice.

She gave a cry of joy and repeated :

“ To-night !”

“ Yes ; shall you go to midnight mass ?”

“ Oh yes !”

“ *Bien !* he will be there. Just at midnight you slip out at the southern door of the church. I shall be there, and will take you where you may see him for a minute—only a minute.”

At this moment a horse and cart appeared in sight; a grinding sound as of the crushing of ice by iron wheels had been, indeed, for several seconds distinctly audible.

The head at once disappeared behind the hedge.

“Do not forget,” said the voice among the dead branches.

No fear of her forgetting! Her little feet became winged, like Mercury's, and flew over the crispy road. She followed Clichette into the kitchen, and read her letter by the light of the fire; then she placed it where the other was, and waited with an impatience—that effectually destroyed her appetite at dinner time—for the pealing of the bells upon the cliff. A full moon, red and swollen, was poised upon the crest of a neighbouring hill, as she emerged with the Countess at last from the gate, and proceeded to ascend to the Church of Our Lady. Everything was distinct enough now; she even imagined that she saw a carriage standing in the road, a hundred yards or more to the north of the cliff; but probably the shadow of some projecting rock, as it lay upon the white snow,

assumed that guise to her excited fancy. But what after all, to her, would have been a road encumbered and choked up with carriages, while the sweet rhythm of the Christmas bells filled her ears? They had not forgotten her after all; for once their voices became articulate. Amid all their clangour, she could distinguish in a melodious *sotto voce*, like a refrain: "He is come! He is come!"

"Dear bells," she thought, "I know it; I have his letter in my bosom; but I shall kiss you all the same when I climb into the steeple to-morrow."

Just about the time that Fifine heard the voice in the hedgerow, a carriage with two horses arrived at the village auberge, and a lady, very pale, and thin, and feeble, descended, who, after a lengthy conference with the landlord as to the whereabouts of a certain Madame Pleuretout, concluded to remain for the night. A blazing fire of logs was therefore kindled in the principal chamber, a dinner was placed beside it, and the pale lady, deeply agitated after her inter-

view with the landlord, and pale no longer, walked the floor for long hours ; now pressing her hot cheeks against the frosty panes, and again wringing her white hands before the curling flames. She had tasted of her dinner as a sparrow might. She was worn out by fatigue. The flush on her cheek was a hectic and delusive one. Her pulse beat a wild tattoo. Every nerve seemed jangled and broken.

“Sixteen years ago to-night,” she said at last, throwing herself into a chair ; “how the snow fell, and the wind howled about that old house in the Rue de Picpus ! It was so cold, so dreary, so desolate ; and Clichette, how frightened she was ! and no wonder. Poor girl, she must be getting old now—like her mistress ;” and rising from her seat she looked at herself in the mirror. “Sixteen years ago,” she mused ; “then I was but a child, and a comely child too. Now I am a woman of thirty-seven—sick and weary, faded and broken down before my time. I wonder if I shall ever be well and strong again. My heart leaps and throbs so, and I feel a hundred pulses beating in my poor head.

Ah well," resuming her chair, "I shall, at least, see my darlings again, and that will make me very happy. Oh! I have done so wrong to neglect them all these years—I should not be forgiven for it; but they will—they will, I know; they will be glad to see and welcome the wanderer back again. And Charles will be there too, with his merry laugh, and his good-natured, handsome face. Ah! my good angel! my faithful, chivalrous friend!—my respectful, gentle lover! Was it not enough that *I* should expiate, in desolation and sorrow, that one sin of my life? Should not sixteen years of wandering atone? 'Tis hard indeed upon thee, dear one, these long years of waiting and suspense. Dost thou never grow weary? Does thy patience never tire? Will the fountain of thy devotion *never* grow dry? Ah! and after all thou mayest wait in vain. The end is coming, darling; but thou wilt weep for me, I know. Thou wilt kiss my cold lips, and never kiss woman more, Charles. And thou wilt plant the violets I love upon my grave, and pluck them thence and wear them upon thy bosom, thinking always—always of me.

Yes, yes, I know. Ah! dear God! the world is indeed hard upon me and thee!" and burying her face in her hands she wept bitterly. "Women envy me," she continued, through her sobs; "the world rings with my name—I am publicly crowned with flowers—I hear people in the boxes say, 'She must be a happy woman!' Ah, God! a woman with a frozen heart — did they but only know it!"

At this moment she heard the pealing of church bells. She started up, brushed back the hair from her eyes, then stepped to the window, and opened it. Yes, there could be no mistake about it; they were Christmas bells, and to her excited fancy they seemed to say :

"She is come. She is come."

The night was still, white and ghastly. The moon, red as with wine, hung over the eastern hills, and seemed to shiver as the frost-laden wind swept down the valley. A parti-coloured light, like a prism, danced upon the summit of the cliff; the village, as yet, lay in shadow.

A sudden thought seized her, and she rang

with an energy that brought the landlord in person to her door.

“What are those bells?” she asked.

“They are ringing, madame, for midnight mass.”

She thanked him, and he retired.

“Yes,” she said musingly. “It may do me good; I shall go.”

Wrapping herself carefully in a shawl she apprised the landlord of her intention, and a few minutes later left the inn. She had not walked more than a hundred yards, when, hearing the sound of wheels, she turned and saw a carriage stop at the door of the inn. Had she known who it was that had just arrived, she certainly would have turned back at once; but the Vicomte had written that he would arrive on the morrow; it surely could not be he, so she hastened on in the footsteps of two honest villagers whom she overheard conversing about the price of Christmas candles: and at length arrived at the path which led to the Church of Our Lady, where Fifine, indifferent for once in her life to the Virgin and the bright altar and the lighted tapers, was waiting for the moment

when the voice of Honoré should come from somewhere out of the night's shadows, and curdle her very soul with the terror of a mysterious joy.

CHAPTER X.

ASTRÆA REDUX.

MARIE DE LAFERRIÈRE arrived panting at the summit of the cliff, just in time to see the leathern curtain, at the church door, fall upon the two villagers.

How well she remembered the place now ! The great brown flank of the church, with its flying buttresses, its gargoyles and silver-tipped finials ; the chancel and the little presbytère to the right, and the great flamboyant tower to the left—features, all of which she had noticed one summer morning, sixteen years ago, when, at the altar within, she had sworn to become the wife of Henri de Laferrière.

The night, however, had greatly changed

the aspect of the place. Before, it had appeared riant, dove-haunted, the very sanctuary of the loves ; now, without having become absolutely sinister, its appearance, as it arose athwart the flood of moonlight, conveyed a sense of freezing awe.

Purple and gold shone through the quatrefoils of the narrow windows dimly, without the power of outward illumination. Until the moon, therefore, should have mounted a degree or two higher, a deep shadow would from necessity lie upon this side of the cliff.

She stood in this shadow, and alone, shivering. To the left, upon a narrow ledge between the tower and the precipice, lay a white light as if reflected from the glow of burning platinum, into which a human shadow would have been projected with the clearness and precision of a silhouette.

The bell had ceased to peal. The mass had commenced ; scrannel-pipe responses came from the wheezy old organ at intervals, followed by a low hum of voices. Then all grew painfully still ; the very earth seemed to hold its breath ; not the faintest breeze could she feel tingle upon her face. There was,

indeed, an unusual stir in the heavens, and a great dancing of attendance by asteroids about the steady burning planets ; but below, within the sweep of the horizon, nothing moved. Yes, a shadow fell at that moment, almost with a sound, so sharp and abrupt was it, in that patch of moonlight upon the edge of the precipice ; the shadow evidently of a man. It was in no wise startling, however, and she felt it, indeed, to be a pleasant inroad upon the prevailing stillness.

She thought she would enter the church now. She would kneel unobserved perhaps behind a column, and say a prayer or two, and then return to the inn, for the cold began to sting her bitterly.

But something in the air seemed to cling to her skirts, and drag her back from the door. She had drawn the curtain partly aside, and had obtained a glimpse of the candles upon the altar, when she thought, " No ! I will wait a few minutes, and then I shall be stronger."

So she drew back, and walked slowly towards the presbytere and round to the other side of the church, where she was screened from the sight of any chance comer.

There it was bright as day. All the colour had left the moon, which now shone like a disc of burnished steel. Below lay the village in monochrome; its gaunt trees sprawling like ink-spots here and there upon the general whiteness, and the black crosses in the churchyard alone breaking the dazzling monotony of colour. A sparkle was upon everything. One's very breath flew upward in a million tiny crystals.

She noticed all this, but above all she felt that the cold was biting into her flesh, and with a shiver she hurried on toward the steeple, with the intention of gaining the door of the church in that direction. But as she turned the corner, she observed with a shudder how narrow was the ledge of rock that lay between the tower and the precipice—a simple bare rock covered with ice and snow, and shelving to the edge—not twelve feet distant. She made an involuntary pause at this discovery, and then becoming suddenly conscious that a door was being pushed gently open close beside her, she retreated behind a projecting buttress to avoid being seen, and shortly perceived a woman's or a child's

form, she could not determine which, emerge from the door, look about an instant, and then, as if impelled by fear, quickly retire into the church again. She was about to quit her position behind the buttress, when she was startled by the sound of nearing footsteps, and crouching once more, she saw approach a man, who listened at the door, and glanced uneasily about him. The moon fell full upon his face—a face nearly covered with a jet-black beard, and unlike any she had ever seen. She hastily concluded that what she had just witnessed was a more or less abortive attempt at an assignation.

At this moment a portion of her black dress, which lay upon the snow, attracted his attention, and walking up quickly to where she was crouching, he said with a laugh :

“Ah, Mdlle. Fifine, here you are at last—ch !”

Startlingly erect grew the crouching figure at the sound of that voice. A heat as of molten lead had suddenly sped through her shivering body—he could feel some of it in her breath as it smote his cheek.

“What do you want with Fifine ?” she

asked, in a low sibilant tone that went through him like a knife.

He recoiled several feet, and an exclamation of horror escaped his lips.

"Answer me, Henri de Laferrière, what do you want with my child?" she continued, in a louder key.

"Phantom, devil, whatever you are," he answered, his teeth all in a chatter, "you are mistaken—that is not my name."

"Liar!" she cried, darting forward and tearing his beard from his face. "Liar from the beginning—look up at the stars! let the moon fall upon your blanched face—upon your colourless lips—upon the broad scar, where the sabre smote you sixteen years ago—and swear, if you can, that you are not Henri de Laferrière."

He had taken another step backward as she plucked at his beard, and now stood in frightful proximity to the edge of the abyss. But he did not perceive it, and, indeed, he chanced to stand just where the crevice was that was filled with soil, and the bushes that grew in it, laden with ice and snow, appeared by the white light to form a part of the cliff itself.

"Great God!—Marie!" he exclaimed, trembling from head to foot; "what brought you here?"

"The voice of Heaven," she said solemnly. "The reign of justice is now, perhaps, at hand. I have expiated *my* crime. The moment has now come when you should repent of yours."

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"You came here for some foul purpose," she pursued. "You had some devilish design upon my Fifine. I heard treachery in the tones of your voice—having heard it before I recognised it well. Sixteen years ago to-night, I suffered such pangs as no man ever endures, to bring her into the world. For sixteen years I have neglected her, because you were her father. God broke up my stony heart at last, and brought me here in time to snatch her from the jaws of hell! to save her, perhaps, from the infamy you wrought for me. Do you mean to tell me that God had not some purpose in this? So sure as the planets burn above our head—so sure, Henri de Laferrière, I repeat, has the time come for you to repent of your sins."

At this moment a childish voice came from the door.

“Are you there?” it said. “And will you now take me to Honoré?”

He made an impulsive movement forward, but she sprang at him like a tigress; he recoiled to elude her grasp, slipped in the snow, and stumbled backward. It all passed with the rapidity of a gleam of light. Loose earth rolled down the crevice; fragments of rock went bounding into the chasm, and a ghastly and awful face, with wildly-rolling eyes, appeared among the icy twigs; clenched and blood-stained hands were upon the ragged edge of the cliff.

“Your hand, Marie!—for the love of Christ, your hand! Don’t you see that I am sinking? I am slipping on this accursed ice! Oh, damnation! she does not hear me. Help—help!” he yelled, like a madman.

Deaf ears, indeed, were hers; at that moment she had fallen cold, rigid, and insensible into the snow. But Fifine, who had witnessed the terrible accident, brought the mass to a sudden termination by her screams, just as the bell tinkled for the elevation of

the Host, and the whole congregation came pouring out at the door.

"See—there he is still!" she cried, pointing to the edge of the precipice.

Only the eyes and forehead were now visible. He was sinking by inches as his strength gave way. He had endeavoured to cling to the rock by his teeth, and he nearly choked with broken ice and the blood of his lacerated gums, as he cried to the people above him :

"Help! good people! For God's sake, help!"

A dozen bodies were at once prostrated upon the rock—a dozen pair of hands were outstretched—swift feet flew up the ladders in the steeple, to cut the bell-ropes—but it was too late! The white forehead and the rolling eyes appeared one instant in the moonlight, then the dry twigs snapped, the loose earth rolled down in a mass, the clenched fists disappeared with a fragment of rock in their grasp, and a shriek like that of a lost soul went through the length and breadth of that peaceful valley.

Everybody put their hands to their ears,

to shut out that other sound, which found its way, nevertheless, into every heart—the thud of a mangled and bleeding body, as it fell upon the frozen earth two hundred feet below.

There came a momentary patter of loose stones, then all was still.

Every face upon the cliff was blanched with terror. Not a voice spoke until Father Joseph, pushing into the centre of the awe-stricken crowd, said :

“Was this a crime or an accident ? who in this assembly can tell ?”

“An act of God’s retributive justice, and not a crime,” said a strange voice.

All involuntarily crossed themselves, and turned in the direction of the speaker. He was kneeling at a distance, with the prostrate figure of a woman in his arms. The landlord of the inn recognised them both instantly.

“Who then was the man ?” pursued the curé.

“Father Joseph,” said the stranger, rising with his burden to his feet, and turning his face toward the now awe-stricken curé, “his name was one with which you are only too familiar. Good people, his was the name of

the blackest-hearted scoundrel that the sun ever shone upon, and who came here to-night with designs upon the honour, and perhaps the life, of Mdle. Fifine. Let that for the moment suffice."

A low murmur immediately ran through the crowd. Father Joseph's faculties were in a chaotic tumult. The sight of D'Harmontal, kneeling beside a woman whose face had haunted so many of his later dreams; the awful manner in which the bond that lay so heavily upon his conscience had now been cancelled; the time, the place, the ghastly accessories of the tragedy—all this, partaking so strongly of the supernatural and the miraculous, confused the good man sadly.

"Go, some of you, and you too, Father Joseph," cried D'Harmontal, promptly realising the situation, "and look after the dead; in case of there being a spark of life in the man, give him the benefit of the viaticum. I am grateful now, and will not begrudge him that much, for he will surely need it in the other world. Then, some of you, not many, though, stay and lend help to the living. It is freezing cold here; where shall this lady be carried?"

D'Harmontal's words went to the uttermost limits of the crowd, part of which was still in the church ; and in this wise they reached the ears of the Countess de Rauville. She had comprehended little as yet, beyond a notion that some great catastrophe had occurred. At such times there is a brief interval when the most voluble tongue cleaves frozen to the roof of the mouth. When, however, she learned that a lady had fainted with terror, and was to all appearance very ill, she immediately said :

“ Bring her to my house at once. I will go now and prepare for her reception.”

Fifine joined her at the presbytère, told her what had occurred, and together they descended the cliff.

When the Countess's words were reported to the Vicomte, it was observed by those who communicated them that a smile of satisfaction appeared an instant upon his lips. He insisted upon carrying her himself down the steep incline, and up to the very door of the old house. There, to the astonishment of everybody, he relinquished her into the arms

of two village matrons, and disappeared in the direction of Saint Loup.

The Countess directed her to be brought into her chamber, and to be placed upon her own bed. A recently kindled fire sputtered upon the hearth, and a single candle burned feebly in a sconce ; so that, partially concealed as they were by the bed-hangings, the Countess did not recognise the features of Marie.

"Sit by her side, Fifine," she said. "I shall send for the doctor, and return in a minute with some brandy."

The fire, leaping upon a mass of pitch as it oozed from the heated log, burst into a ruddy flame, and fell full upon the ghastly face with its half-closed eyes upon the bed.

Fifine sat awe-stricken, watching her.

All at once the purple lids opened, and her eyes fell vacantly upon the fire, the candle, the bed-furniture, and—Fifine.

She raised herself up slowly in bed and took Fifine's little hand in hers.

"Are you Fifine?" she asked in a feeble whisper.

"Yes, madame ; are you better?"

“ Yes, thank God, much better, now that I have seen you, little one. Come and kiss me, darling ; I am your mother. I have not seen you, dear, since you were a little baby.”

With a low, startled cry, Fifine arose and flung her arms about her neck.

“ I knew, sweet mother, that you would come,” she said.

After a minute, Marie lifted up the golden head and said, looking tenderly into her eyes :

“ Tell me, Fifine, who is Honoré ?”

The little face became as red as a geranium-blossom, and she buried it in Marie’s bosom.

“ He is my cousin, and he loves me very, very much,” she said in a whisper.

Her head still lay upon Marie’s breast, when the Countess entered with the brandy.

She stopped, rooted to the spot ; the glass fell from her hand, then a look of ineffable joy passed across her features.

Marie looked up. A smile—the mere ghost of a smile—flickered about her mouth.

“ Mother dear, I have come home at last,” she said, extending her poor wasted hand. “ I have been very wicked. I am very sorry. Take me in your arms and say you forgive

me. I will never leave you again, darling mother."

A loud knock at the door below came jangling in upon their joy, and recalled to both their minds the awful terror of the night. The Countess, with a blanched face, quitted the room. Then Marie heard a scuffling and pushing of feet, as from the carrying of some heavy and inert weight ; then the unlocking and unbolting of a door, and the shifting of furniture or old lumber in the room below ; then a voice louder than the rest reached her ears.

"He is quite dead," it said.

She heard no more. A mist swam before her eyes, and she fell backward upon the pillow. When the doctor came, he shook his head gravely.

"I am afraid, madame, that she will not survive the shock," he said to the Countess ; "but we will hope for the best."

CHAPTER XI.

FULFILLED PROPHECIES.

IT was too late for the viaticum. Amid the terror of that one brief instant, with the blind rock rushing swiftly before his eyes, there had been no time even for a prayer. They found him bent and broken under the garden wall, where he had been hurled, as he fell, from a projecting angle of the cliff.

His neck had evidently been dislocated, for when they raised him up, his head sank heavily backward, and swung to and fro as they carried him into the house.

By the Countess's commands, he was taken into the old dining-hall ;—a dismal, musty place, roofed with interlacing rafters of smoke-seasoned oak, and filled with broken furniture

A moth-and-mouse-eaten sofa, propped up at one end by an empty wine case, served as a bier. Upon this he was placed, and covered with a sheet. The effect, by the light of a single candle, was to the minds of the villagers excessively ghastly. Three of them, however, electing to remain with the body until it should be viewed by the proper authorities in the morning, a fire of logs was kindled upon the spacious hearth. Food, wine and cognac were brought to them by Clichette, and by such factitious aid the terror was shorn for a time of some of its proportions. But before morning, the stillness, the sheeted form, the *reflets* of the flame dancing fantastically among the old timbers above, the very mystery of the house itself, had their effect upon the minds of our three villagers, and they were glad enough to perceive the dawn at last athwart the one window—the window with the spandrels high up in the wall.

The village officials arrived at an early hour to view the body. The doctor, who had remained all night, testified as to the cause of death. Father Joseph proved the identity of the deceased, and by means of the marriage

register, established his relationship to the Countess de Rauville and her daughter. Fifine signed a deposition as to the cause of the accident, and that ended the inquiry. Upon the body was found a watch which had stopped at twenty minutes past twelve; a purse containing three hundred francs in gold; a few letters, corroborative of Father Joseph's testimony; and a sealed packet, which, when opened, proved a still more conclusive means of identification.

These were all placed in the Countess's hands. The officials withdrew; two of the three villagers concluded to remain in case of need; and the body was given over to the undertaker, who had been sitting in one corner of the room upon a spick-and-span new coffin of *bois d'acajou*, pending the termination of the inquest.

Marie had failed rapidly during the night, and was conscious at intervals only. With the coming of the dawn, the doctor examined her carefully. His eyes fell before the Countess's eager look, and he shook his head sadly.

"It were better, madame, to prepare for

the worst," he said in answer to her imperative command that he should speak truth.

Meanwhile, by a strange conjuncture of events, the Marquis de Laferrière, in total ignorance of the disaster of the night, was fast approaching the house, where, unsuspected by him, the body of his brother and rival lay. It happened in this wise :

Pierre, carefully concealing from Honoré the manner in which his letter had been delivered to Fifine, contented himself with saying that he had seen the young lady, and that she would meet him on the cliff at half-past six o'clock the following morning. Accordingly Honoré rose early and set out about five o'clock for the rendezvous in question. It chanced, that twenty minutes later, the Marquis, who had been made aware of Honoré's absence and suspected its cause, arrived at Campvallon. The stupid and unreliable Pierre acquainted him at once with the object of Honoré's visit to Saint Loup. At that moment the Marquis ordered the horses' heads to be turned about, and with a heart full of anger for


son's disobedience, and what he believed to be the Countess's secret connivance at the same, was driven with great expedition to the old house under the cliff.

He thought it strange, this loitering about the house of people, who evidently attached more or less interest to his coming. He thought it still stranger to see certain easily recognisable officials, with grave and preoccupied faces, emerge from the gate as he descended. Clichette's solemn face and manner impressed him still more. Without a word, as if he had been expected, she led him across the court, up the staircase, and into the salon. It seemed very cold and dreary there, and an almost preternatural hush filled the house. Despite of his as yet unappeased anger, he could not altogether shake off a certain feeling of awe that was fast creeping over him.

In a minute or two the Countess appeared at the door.

"M. le Marquis, you have then heard——" she began.

"That my son, in disobedience of my commands, has run away from home in order to visit this Fifine, and is probably now under



your roof. Yes, madame, I know this," he answered.

The Countess flashed a strange look at him; her lips curled.

"This is all you know, then, M. le Marquis?"

"It is quite enough, madame."

"Ah, well! I am glad you have come. Be seated; I shall return in an instant."

He saw her disappear through the doorway—heard the rustle of her dress upon the stairs—the creak of rusty hinges—a sound of whispered words, and the tread of men's feet. Then the creak of the door again, and the rustle of the dress upon the stairs, and at last the Countess reappeared at the doorway.

"Be good enough to follow me, M. de Laferrière," she said, in a freezing accent. Something in her face positively startled him then. A look was there that sometimes indicates the possession of a broken heart, the look that comes of sleepless nights and long weary days. Behind those tearless eyeballs was that dull pain which no human nostrum can ever allay.

He followed her mechanically.

She descended the stairs, opened a door, and motioned him to enter. He noticed first a pungent smell as of decay, and then the odour of fresh varnish. He saw a dimly-lighted room of large dimensions, and in great apparent disorder.

She closed and locked the door when she had entered; and this action so diverted his attention, that he did not at first perceive, in a corner, a coffin standing upon trestles and partly covered by a cloth. When he did so, at last, he started back in horror.

"Good God, madame!" he cried; "what has happened?"

Without a word of reply at first, she walked straight to the bier and pulled aside the cloth; then she turned and said in a tone of icy deliberation:

"Approach, M. de Laferrière."

He did so.

"Look!" she said, pointing to the livid face within the shell. "Look at him who has been the curse of all our lives!"

The Marquis was not easily startled, but the sight that met his gaze caused him to draw back in dismay.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, with a gasp.

"It means," she answered, steadily looking him in the eyes, and still holding the cloth in her hand, "that Henri de Laferrière is not shamming death this time. Look at him! the pest, the liar, the debaucher of women—there he lies. Take him away as soon as you like; he is your brother, and we want none of him here."

"But I understand nothing! How did this happen? I thought he was in America. How came he here?" demanded the Marquis.

"He came last night by stealth, to entice his child—Heaven knows for what purpose—from the church. In the very act, he came face to face with his wife, whom he had not seen for sixteen years. He staggered back in dismay, and fell—stricken by an avenging angel's hand, let us hope—from the top of the cliff into my garden. Think you that Providence had no hand in this—that it was by chance alone he was cast, a broken carcass, into the home whose hearthstone he had laid desolate and bare?"

"This is awful, madame; you terrify me by

your words. And you speak, too, of your daughter. Is she with you, then?"

"Yes, but she will not remain with me long. She lies dying in the room above, and may her blood be upon the heads of the Laferrières!" she retorted fiercely.

"No! no! not dying—anything but that!" he cried, leaping forward and seizing her by the arm.

She cast his hand indignantly aside.

"Yes, dying!" she repeated. "For sixteen years I have waited patiently for her coming. I have lain awake at nights. I have worn my knees fairly to the bone with praying. I have shed tears enough to drench the whole cliff, as with rain. I have felt my heart-strings snap one by one. I have lived but for one thing—dreamed of but one thing through all these weary years—that she, so cruelly and heartlessly wronged, would come back to me again. At last God seemed good to me; my long penance came to an end—my prayers were answered. Last night, as the star came to Bethlehem one Christmas-eve, she came and crept into my poor old waiting arms once more. She was a child no longer,

but a woman, whose woe-laden heart had well-nigh broken as mine had ; who had suffered as I had suffered ; who had prayed as I had prayed ; and who came, a dying woman, to obtain a mother's final blessing."

He had staggered against the wall for support. Great beads of sweat stood upon his forehead ; his lips were parted, his teeth were tightly clenched.

"Dying !" came from him in a sibilant whisper.

"Dying — dying — yes," she answered. "At this hour to-morrow, she may lie as he now lies—but *not* beside him—oh no ! She would turn over in her coffin, I am sure, were we thus to insult her dead body !" this with a sardonic laugh that made the Marquis's blood run cold. "No, no ! sweet perfumes and spices shall be burnt beside *her* bier, and she shall be covered over with camellias and orange-blossoms. You see where we have put him ?—here where the refuse and lumber of my father's house have for a hundred years been thrown. And even here he is an incumbrance, of which I insist upon your ridding us as quickly as possible."

"Madame, are you mad?" faltered the Marquis.

"Mad! Did you say mad?" she exclaimed, dashing the cloth upon the floor and stepping up to where he stood; "not yet—oh no, monsieur, not yet! You have heard but the prologue. There is much to follow. When you last did me the honour to enter this house, you obtained a victory over me. You sneered. You scorned my suggestion that the marriage of these two children might be some compensation for a great deal of suffering, in which we had had an equal share. You left me with a pleasant sense, no doubt, of triumph. But I then told you, if you remember, that you would soon repent of your harshness towards my daughter. The time for your repentance has now come!"

"Well, madame!" he faltered again.

"Your implacability," she pursued; "though veiled in courteous words, has been for years a stinging insult to me. Hitherto I have had no answer to make to the charges you prefer against my daughter. Now the long nightmare is over. Now that a coffin has come as a finis to the dismal tale of woe, the

revelation I am about to make is most fitting and opportune. You deny that a marriage-certificate was ever sent to you; and you have reaffirmed and persisted in the belief that she treacherously and basely deceived you. Is this not so?"

"I cannot deny it," he answered.

"You maintained that belief in this very house?"

"I did."

"Alleging as a reason, that sufficient time had elapsed for her justification if she had any to offer?"

Again he assented.

"Well, M. de Laferrière, she did not do this for the simple reason that the only possible proofs were in the possession of this man. Here they are. They were found upon his person, and will doubtless prove pleasant reading to you."

With this she took a packet from her pocket and placed it in his hands. The seals had been already broken. He opened it with trembling fingers, and saw first a marriage-certificate, dated June 3rd, 1832, setting forth that Mdlle. de Rauville, of Paris, was on that

day married to Henri de Laferrière, of the same place, and was signed by the curé of Saint Loup. The next was the letter he had received the day of Henri's supposed funeral, which he could never subsequently find. The third, and last, was the original letter written by Marie, and bearing the date of the 6th of June, 1832. The slightest comparison of the two revealed the forgery. He saw it at a glance. A cry of anguish burst from his lips. The letters fell to the floor. He turned a ghastly white face toward the Countess, and tottering, sought a chair into which he sank helplessly. His head fell upon his breast; he covered his face with his hands, and for a few minutes rocked himself to and fro in this position.

The Countess, who had been standing hitherto, as rigid and impassive as marble, now began to relent a little.

"He must have loved her after all," she thought. And perhaps, too, she had not made sufficient allowance for the humiliation and disgrace of that fatal wedding-night, which she now reflects must have been terrible to a man like the Marquis.

She watched him intently a moment.

"Yes! he is suffering deeply," she said to herself.

Then she stepped up and touched him on the arm.

"Come, M. de Laferrière, let us go," she said, in a gentler tone.

"Leave me, madame," he answered, without removing his hands from his face. "Leave me for a time alone with my sorrow. My punishment is more than I can bear. Come back in an hour. Lock the door, and permit no one to enter. I shall be calmer when you return."

CHAPTER XII.

SICK UNTO DEATH.

WHEN she returned, she found him pacing the floor. His face was awful to behold. His eyes were sunken, and their lids had become purple and swollen. His lips were bloodless, and his hair was in disorder. His manner was that of a drunken man, as he staggered forward to meet her.

"Forgive me," he said, in a tone of helpless misery. "The time of my humiliation has come—just as you said it would. I see now, how much I have wronged her; how my pride has blinded me to an almost self-evident truth. You will never know the shame I feel at being deceived by so clumsy an artifice—at being outwitted by two such

contemptible scoundrels. I now realise what the honesty of your daughter must have been, when feeling secure from discovery, and knowing the probable effect of her disclosure upon me, she frankly confessed her error. I now perceive that it was *my* fault that she did not confide this secret to you—*my* fault that she did not further unladen her heart to me. Again and again she implored me, by her looks, to permit her to lay the whole dismal burden at my feet. I am alone to blame for all the misery you have endured, madame. The very name of Laferrière must grate upon your ears. I must share in the loathing and hate you feel for the clod in the corner there; who, thank God! for my good name, has escaped a brother's vengeance. But, madame, I must see your daughter. Take me to her! I called you mother once, for a few sweet hours! by the memory of that brief happy time, I implore you to let me see her once more, and hear her say that she forgives me."

The Countess shook her head gravely.

"Do, madame," he pleaded, falling upon his knees. "Have you not sufficiently tri-

umphed over me? I was iron once, now look at me! am I not crushed and broken at last? You must perceive that I worshipped your daughter, worshipped the idol even when I thought it was broken and cast down from its high pedestal. You must perceive how I have suffered through all these terrible years. Is this not expiation enough? See! I kneel. I have never done that before except to my Creator. It is much, madame—much for *me* to do.”

As the Countess still appeared to hesitate, he sprang excitedly to his feet.

“What! would you refuse me, madame?” he cried. “Would you deny a crumb of bread to a starving man? You say that she is ill—that—great God!—she is dying, and yet you deny me! When I see sweet fruit snatched from my lips, and the future a naked desert stretching out before me to the very end, you deny me the bare comfort of hearing her say that she forgives me for the foul wrong I have done her. But you shall *not* refuse me, madame. Do so, and I shall tear the house down; neither bars nor bolts shall prevent my seeing her,”

Then as he saw the Countess's features harden again, he added in an altered tone : " There, there ; I did not mean to be violent, but see how I suffer ! It is little that I ask. For God's sake grant it, madame !"

She hesitated a moment longer, then turning toward the door, said :

" Wait until I return. I shall see if it is possible."

In a few minutes she re-entered the room.

" Come," she said. " My daughter wishes to see you."

He followed her up the stairs, and his heart gave a mighty throb as he entered the chamber.

A bed at the extremity of the room—a face mortally white upon the pillow—a pair of mournful dark eyes fastened upon him—a grave man in black standing by the bedside.

He saw all this as in a dream.

" Leave us for a moment, doctor," said the Countess.

The door closed, and the Marquis, with a half-stifled cry, knelt by the bedside and took the wasted hand in his. For a moment he could not speak ; only smothered sobs came

from the bed-clothes where his face was buried.

"Forgive me, Marie," he said at last. "I dare not look you in the face until you say that you forgive me."

She reached over by a strong effort and touched him on the forehead.

"I have nothing to forgive. Fate has been unkind to me, that is all ;" she answered in a whisper.

"No—no—no !" he cried. "I do not merit such generosity. I have wronged you, Marie—deeply, foully. I should have known that you would not deceive me. I listened to others, when I should have believed you. I put faith in the words of a villain, and scorned the prayers of an angel, and yet you say you have nothing to forgive."

"Nothing, nothing," she replied. "I have but a little time to live, and I am very happy to know that you think ill of me no longer."

"Don't speak like that," he exclaimed. "You torture me ; I do not believe it—you will live for many years—it must, it shall be so."

She smiled sadly and shook her head.

"No—no, monsieur," she answered; "the end is near; and though it seems very hard to leave you all just when I have got back home again, I am glad that your faith in me has been restored. It has been a heavy burden upon my heart, all these years, that you believed me to be a guilty woman. I wished to be honest. I had done wrong, very wrong, but I intended to make amends for it. A woman does not like to confess her errors, as a rule, monsieur; and I was sorely tempted to say nothing about the secret marriage; but I could not deceive you; and then I summoned up my courage, and told you all, but it seems my letter never reached you, monsieur, and you thought of course that I had never written."

"I did—I did—let it be said to my eternal shame," he answered bitterly; "but I know it now. Yes, you *did* write to me, Marie."

She drew a long sigh.

"I am glad, very glad," she said, and fell back upon the pillow.

Then, kneeling once more, the Marquis seized her hand.

"Marie," he said in a low, tremulous tone, "will you consent to forget the past? We were united once; it was not for long indeed, but within those few brief hours was compressed all the happiness I have ever known. And now that the obstacle is removed and you are free, may we not——"

Here he paused in dismay, started to his feet again, and covered his face with his hands.

"I forgot," he said; "there is another now, is there not?"

She turned her head on the pillow, lifted her eyes to his, and smiled.

"I am very thankful," she said. "I know what you mean; but there is, as you say, another, and that other has been very, very good to me."

He was silent a long time; then with a sigh he answered:

"I know it. I do not complain. It would be but just."

The Countess, hearing a ring at the bell, had quitted the room shortly after the Marquis's entrance into the chamber. At this moment she reappeared, and said to him;

"Monsieur, your son has arrived ; do you wish to see him ?"

He sprang eagerly forward.

"Yes," he answered ; "bring both the children here at once."

A few minutes later, when they had entered, he took Fifine, much to her astonishment, in his arms and kissed her. "Surely," she thought, looking at his swollen eye-lids, "Honoré's papa has been crying." Then the Marquis placed her hand in Honoré's, and led them both to the bedside.

"Marie," he said, "since' the other cannot be, shall not these children, united, be a bond between us ?"

She raised herself upon the pillow, and with a wan smile, said, though with difficulty :

"Yes, it will atone. I—I—am happy, very happy now !" and she fell back with closed eyes, like a corpse, upon the pillow again. A cry of alarm filled the room.

"You have killed her. She will not live until to-morrow," said the doctor sternly, when he re-entered the room.

She was in a raging delirium all that after-

noon. She cried incessantly for her child, for her mother—and for one other.

Where could that other be! He was on the cliff the night before. He carried her in his arms to the door of the house, and then disappeared into the night. Mysterious, indeed, at such a time was his absence! The Countess wondered, Fifine wondered, even poor, distracted Clichette—who sat all the afternoon wringing her hands just outside the chamber door—sadly wondered.

And Marie, too! Ah, a dreadful desolation amid all her joy, was this of his absence.

Once in a lucid interval she had asked the Countess :

“Has he come yet?”

And the Countess answered :

“Not yet, darling, but he will surely be here ;” not knowing what other consolation to offer.

Again in a longer interval, and her last, she said, putting her ear quite close to her mother’s :

“When I am gone, tell him that I loved him—loved him with all my heart and

soul. Be sure and tell him that, mother dear."

Then wild delirium again.

Night came. The doctor said : " The end is not far away."

The Marquis lay upon a sofa in the salon—his face buried in his hands. The children stood, hand clasped in hand, by the bedside. The Countess, with a breaking heart and tearless eyes, sat in a chair by the pillow, and simply watched, for there was nothing else left for her to do.

The clock struck nine.

"Charles, dearest Charles, have you forsaken me?" cried Marie wildly in her delirium.

There came a sudden, sharp ring at the door-bell ; hurried steps were heard upon the stairs ; the door of the chamber flew open, and D'Harmontal entered in great excitement closely followed by a stranger.

"For God's sake," he said, looking in consternation at the pale faces about him, "do not tell me that it is too late ! I have brought this gentleman, an English physician, who has made such cases as hers a study for many

years. I was lucky to find him still in Paris. I heard but yesterday that he was there. We have come with all possible despatch ; do not tell me that it is now too late."

"We shall see," said the stranger, and imposing silence with a gesture upon them all, he gravely approached the bedside, and held a whispered consultation with the village doctor, which lasted but a single moment. Then he turned with a very solemn face to the Countess. "We shall see, madame. I cannot yet tell. Leave us alone for a short time, and I will then give you a definite opinion as to her chances of recovery."

Whereupon they all repaired to the salon, whither they had been preceded, an hour since, by the Marquis. The presence of the latter occasioned the Vicomte some surprise, but reflecting at once that it should be referred to the catastrophe of the eve, he made him a formal salutation, and commenced to pace the floor in silence. Honoré sat with his hand in Fifine's in a distant corner. The Countess stepped into the embrasure of a window, and stared vacantly at the dazzling whiteness of the garden below. Not a word

was spoken, but a long-drawn sigh came now and then from the Marquis's lips. What an unconscionably long half-hour it was to them all! What an intolerable and agonising suspense! But as the longest human suspense of all—that of waiting for the mystery which lies beyond the grave—has at some time an end, so had this at last.

A step was heard in the corridor, and the stranger entered with a more cheerful face. He sought out the Countess at once, and said :

“ Your daughter, madame, with proper care and attention, will, I think, recover. Her ailment has been more of a mental than of a physical nature.”

A subdued cry of joy burst from every one present. Every right hand was extended to grasp the English doctor's. For the first time in twenty-four hours, the Countess wept. Fifine almost smothered Viquey in the fervour of her gladness. Honoré, bewildered at the mingled joy and horror of the day's events, shrank into his corner again. At last, as the Countess was about to leave the room, the Marquis called her aside and congratulated

her with deep feeling. She, on her part, responded by apologising for anything offensive she might have uttered in the fervour of the morning's interview. Thereupon he summoned Honoré from his hiding-place, kissed Fifine tenderly upon the cheek, and extended his hand amicably to the Vicomte.

"My dear D'Harmontal," he said, slowly gulping down the rising tears, "I hope that God will spare her to you. No one deserves her as you do."

The Vicomte, returning the pressure of his hand, thanked him warmly, and added :

"I know nothing of what has taken place during the last twenty-four hours. Is your faith in her then restored?"

The Marquis pulled Marie's letter from his pocket and extended it to D'Harmontal.

"Your confidence in her has been abundantly justified," he said. "This letter was found upon my brother's body; it was accompanied by her marriage-certificate. The other was a forgery. She is an honest woman—and I am a fool."

The Vicomte then took a folded paper from *his* pocket, and gave it to the Marquis.

"I thought that I had a surprise in store for you," he said; "but it is better as it is. This is a deposition of your old secretary, Michaud; they did the precious piece of villany between them. Do not open it now. Read it at some other time."

A terrible look appeared an instant in the Marquis's face, then died away again. He took the paper in silence, buttoned up his paletot, called to Honoré, and then, after shaking hands once more with D'Harmontal, quitted the house.

Father and son walked the whole distance to Campvallon through the snow; not a word passed between them. One was intent upon what now would be a deathless sorrow; the other was filled to overflowing with the ecstasy of a joy born of a great affliction.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT LAST.

THE following day at an early hour, the Marquis de Laferrière arrived at the house under the cliff. He was calmer now, and was enabled to have a conference with the Countess, which was shorn of the dramatic and sensational features that characterised their former interview. He was permitted to see Marie for a moment only, but it was a great comfort for him to do even that. His manner had become wonderfully subdued and gentle; and though he coloured a little when the Vicomte entered the room with the air of being a more privileged visitor, he greeted him cordially and frankly as a father might. Then after a brief but reassuring interview

with the English doctor, in which all his doubts as to the ultimate recovery of Marie were effectually set at rest, he proceeded at once to fulfil what he felt to be an excessively onerous obligation towards his dead brother and rival. The undertaker was summoned, and the lid of the coffin was screwed down into its place. Then it was carried to the church of Our Lady and covered with a pall, and lighted candles placed beside it. Father Joseph read a mass, thereby securing to the dead a remission—let us in charity hope—of the major purgatorial pains. The Vicomte and Fifine were both present, at the Countess's desire. They, together with the Marquis, Honoré, and a few inquisitive villagers, were the sole participants in the mass. That concluded, the coffin was reconducted to the bottom of the cliff, placed in a hearse and carried to the nearest railway-station.

The next day the Marquis saw it placed in the vault in Père-la-Chaise, beside the body of the nameless stranger who had perished sixteen years before in that fiery struggle beneath St. Méry's steeple. When

the tomb was closed, the Marquis, reading the inscription it bore, and feeling that there was a significance in it at last, said a fervent amen, and left the cemetery. He never entered it again alive.

The days sped on, and the English physician's predictions as to Marie's recovery were being rapidly fulfilled. He remained himself at Saint Loup for nearly a week, and upon his departure confided his system of treatment, so far as it appeared necessary to him, to the village doctor.

Bright faces now beamed in that old house under the cliff. The Marquis, who returned to Campvallou the day following the completion of his grewsome mission to Père-la-Chaise, called at frequent intervals to learn of the invalid's progress. It had been found quite impossible to drive the Vicomte from Marie's side, and when his services as a watcher were no longer required, and he was forced at night to seek his chamber in the village inn, he never failed to return at an early hour in the morning. In fact the tinkle of the bell when *his* hand fell upon the rope, became shortly as well known to every inmate

of the house, as was the touch of the dawn upon the window-curtains. Mother and daughter smiled to each other when they heard it. Fifine scampered down the staircase, and Clichette ran to unbar the gate, with every tooth in her head visible, in anticipation of the merry words of welcome with which she was sure to be greeted. Somehow he seemed to be as one of the family, and entered without formality of any kind, as the sunshine might, into Marie's chamber.

One day, when her convalescence was far advanced, she looked up into his face and said :

" I am an old and faded woman ; why are you so good and kind to me ? "

" You are neither old nor faded," he answered earnestly. " Nor am I good and kind—unless to love you is to be good and kind ;" and a malicious twinkle came into his eyes.

Down went her own until the lashes swept the roses that now appeared amid the snow of her sunken cheeks. A sweet perturbation seized her, and then an heroic resolve framed itself upon her lips.

" When I thought I was going to die, and

should see you no more," she whispered, "I entrusted my mother with a message——"

"For me?" and the Vicomte grew radiant with expectation.

"For you—yes!"

The Countess at this point arose, and went over to the arm-chair in which Marie was sitting, and kissed her gently.

"Tell him, dear," she said; "he would rather hear it from your lips; tell him he need wait no longer."

Marie's face was hot enough now; and she must have been conscious of the fact, for she immediately covered it with her hands.

The Vicomte, pleasantly startled, removed them, and held them in his own.

"Is it? *Can* it be true?" he whispered. "Has the time indeed come at last, Marie? Is my long waiting really at an end?"

"Yes, my darling—yes," she answered, reaching up and throwing her arms about his neck.

Then the Countess thought it fit to cry, as if her heart was really breaking at last

with joy. And Fifine, when she was told that Viquey was to be her new papa and Honoré's too, hugged him with a vigour that seemed prompted by a no less purpose than actual suffocation; and strange to relate, when the Vicomte attempted to say something in reply to this demonstration of feeling, his voice became husky—he choked, and at last broke down entirely in the attempt.

It was dreadfully cold up in that steeple-top, where the bells were obliged to shake the snow and the hoar-frost from their sides with lusty ringing, all through this wintry time. But Honoré and Fifine would have climbed up there once more if the tower had been an iceberg itself, and had been three times higher than it actually was.

“Do you know, Fifine,” said Honoré, when they had reached the platform, where a curious fringe of icicles hung pendent from the leads, “do you know that when I first saw you that day through the trap-door, I really thought you were a fairy?”

Fifine's answer was drowned in a noisy chatter of swallows, which might have been

—who knows ?—an attestation of the truth of his belief on the part of the birds.

However, there they were ! all their old friends careering in and out of the belfry and all about them. So it being the *jour de l'an*, they fed them with crumbs of a great seed-cake which Jeanette had made expressly in honour of Fifine's sixteenth birth-day. At this unexpected treat, coming, too, at a time when the worms and the caterpillars were all frozen, such a chorus of approval came from the chests of those feathered mites, that Toinette, hearing the sound, and wondering what kind of a jubilee the birds were holding, looked up and saw the lovers once more together ; so that when they descended, Father Joseph was at the door to greet them, this time with smiles and an extended hand. And when Toinette ran out, bare-headed, with her New Year's felicitations, it so happened that a brand-new five-franc piece, by some witchcraft, found its way from Honoré's hand into her horny palm.

At last, Marie was able to sit up for many hours at a time, and from that feeble beginning she was finally in a condition to walk un-

supported about the room. Then an imperative message was sent to the Countess's notary in Paris, commanding him to prepare the hôtel in the Rue de Varennes for immediate occupation.

The whole story, just as it has been narrated in these pages, became known by the Countess's desire, to the whole village. Father Joseph was the intermediary in this business, and it is needless to say, that universal sympathy was felt for the lone woman whom everybody had loved and honoured as Mère Pleuretout ; sympathy at least for her desolate past, and joy for the happiness which had dawned at last, after such weary, weary waiting upon her and her child. Even Clichette shared in the general feeling, and became a personage of exalted consequence throughout the length and breadth of the little commune. For many weeks subsequent to the terrible tragedy on the cliff, it afforded the staple of talk by the evening fire side. Impressive, indeed, to the young, was the warning deduced from the fate of the arch sinner who perished so ignobly on the Christmas morn at the foot of the cliff.

One day, the Countess went down with

Fifine into the village. At every humble cottage she left a gift of money. At every home she said farewell.

The following morning, a number of carriages and wagons drew up and stood in line before the gate of the old house. Into the latter, as a visible sequence of the bustle that appeared to prevail within, boxes, great in number, and prodigious in size, were shortly crowded. Then, as if by a preconcerted signal, the whole village suddenly came and choked up the road. M. Lupin the Maire, the doctor, the notary, the schoolmaster, and Father Joseph were admitted into the house; then, just as the excitement was reaching its culminating point, the gate opened, the drivers leaped from their seats and threw open the carriage doors. All were looking intently for the coming of Marie. At last, leaning upon the arm of the Vicomte, she came; white-faced and feeble, but beautiful still. She stopped in surprise as she beheld a hundred pair of eyes fixed kindly as it seemed upon her. All heads were instantly uncovered, and remained so until she entered the carriage. Then, as she bowed with a


smile from the window, a shout went up from the throat of every villager, a shout that was repeated when the Countess and Fifine entered the carriage, and which rang wildly out upon the air, when the horses, answering the crack of whips, dashed away in the direction of the nearest railway-station.

Smoke ascended no longer from the great clustered chimney; lights gleamed no longer from the windows at night. The old house was left once more in the solitude and darkness with which it had been many times familiar.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

ONE evening in the following May-time, the windows of the Hôtel de Rauville were in such a blaze of light as had not been seen since the night of that fatal ball, seventeen years before, the memory of which had passed into a dim tradition of the Quartier St. Germain. There had been a wedding at the Madeleine in the morning, and now guests crowded the salons to welcome D'Harmontal and his bride. It had somehow transpired that the Vicomtesse and ——the celebrated *prima donna*, were the same, and the intelligence received ample confirmation from those of the guests who had seen her before the footlights at London, St. Petersburg, and other of the world's great capitals.



Her beauty, which had been little impaired by her illness, had assumed another and a newer phase. The transition had been by no means a sudden one. Something gentler, something less of marble and more of warmer human clay, had been insensibly entering into her composition for many months past. The fusion of her old sorrow with the happiness of the present was not yet perfect. Beneath the smile of the bride still lingered a trace of the melancholy that had tintured so many of her later years; but that very smile foreshadowed the end, now fast approaching, when her face should shine, transfigured by the peace and the joy of a perfect love.

That night, however, a shadow like that of a cypress fell upon her happiness. Try as she would, while she remained in those salons, she could not keep the sad, pale face of the Marquis, as she last remembered it, from her thoughts.


The Countess, remarking his absence, though the world did not, whispered to Marie:

"He is not here, poor fellow. I do not blame him. He would have suffered too much."

Marie said not a word in reply, but she felt

it somehow to be a relief when, at eleven, the Vicomte's carriage drove up to the door, and amid much fluttering and swaying to and fro of the crowd, she at last escaped from the salons.

Four days later, the château down in Brittany, where the Vicomte's mother had lived her gloomy life of a recluse for so many years, wore a gala look at last. A bride and a daughter swept for the first time through the noble halls; bonfires gleamed upon all the hills around; wine flowed like water; oxen were roasted whole; and the peasantry for a league around gathered with ribbons and flowers in their hats in the park, and filled the air with huzzas and merry-making. For a whole week the wedding festival lasted. Somehow the story of the Vicomte's wooing got abroad among the people, and to this day, in the talk of the winter evenings, beside the fireside of many a cottage in those dark Breton forests, is heard the well-worn tale of love and constancy, and how, after so many years of weary patient waiting, the beautiful bride came to the good Vicomte's arms at last.



But, reader, when Fifine and Honoré became of a marriageable age, some years later, then there was a wedding that would have done your heart good to behold. Of course it took place in the church of Our Lady of the Cliff, and Father Joseph's voice trembled just a little as he pronounced his final benediction ; then all the village girls, dressed in white, threw flowers at Fifine's feet ; and little wee Jeannot, toddling up to her while she yet stood at the altar, with eyes wide open and cheeks aflame with excitement, presented her with a bouquet almost as big as himself, which getting between his legs, fairly tripped him up as he mounted the altar steps. And then Fifine, catching up the little fellow in her arms—a thing beyond all precedent in a bride—disarranged her veil and her orange-blossoms sadly, in the fervour of the squeeze she then and there gave him in the presence of all the people.

Nobody left the church when the wedded pair entered the sacristy to sign the register, for it was whispered that something more was to come ; and when they emerged, all radiant with happiness at last, and the bright

new silver candlesticks that Fifine had promised Our Lady should be hers on the day of her marriage with Honoré, were finally uncovered, and Father Joseph then announced that the Vicomte d'Harmontal had graciously offered to present Our Lady with a new organ, it was with the greatest difficulty that the people were restrained from shouting outright.

Then, when Honoré and his bride left the church at last, there were the girls in white again, with fresh flowers to strew in their path, who sang a new song composed for the occasion by the village schoolmaster. Whereupon the swallows came down from the steeple in a body, and escorted Fifine, amid much chattering, to the door of the house in the cliff.

But it was a day of surprises. Before night it was known throughout the little village, that the Marquis de Laferrière—he whose sad pale face so many remarked at the marriage ceremony—had given a thousand francs to M. Lupin, to be distributed among the poor of the village.

Then Father Joseph was sent on some pretext into the village, and before he was

fairly out of sight, boxes flew open in the house under the cliff, and within an hour, by the aid of a dozen busy hands, a miracle had been wrought in the good man's life. When he returned to the presbytère, he was literally dumbfounded. Toinette in a silk gown, and with her one eye all in a blaze of excitement, met him on the threshold. When he entered, he found warm carpets upon the brick floor; new polished furniture in all the rooms; bright pictures upon the walls, and a great array of bottles in the hitherto meagre wine-cellar. Before he had well recovered his breath, Fifine and Honoré, D'Harmontal and Marie, burst in upon him with a shout of laughter, and the poor curé had nothing left him but to call them his dear children; and fall into a chair and cry.

By the Countess's orders, the old dining-hall, where the body of Henri de Laferrière had lain one Christmas-day, was cleared of its rubbish, and in it a great feast was spread that night, to which the whole village was invited. When that was over at last, the tables were removed, and the tones of a fiddle set every rustic toe in motion, which

continued, it is to be surmised, long after the bride and groom had disappeared.

Pitou and Gervaise could not be present. Poor old Papillon, who had been for three years a widower, had died several days before, and was buried the very hour of the wedding. When his will was opened and read, it was found, that being childless, he had devised everything to Gervaise. She had grown into a sleek and comely matron by this time. The glove business had been so successful, that with the accession of Papillon's fortune they retired altogether from the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs, and lived thenceforth in the *maisonette* at Auteuil. They had but the one child, who, educated through the Vicomte's instrumentality at St. Cyr, greatly distinguished himself in the Italian war; was decorated at Magenta, and subsequently became a major in a regiment of cuirassiers.

Michaud disappeared about the time of Henri de Laferrière's death, and the Vicomte was unable to obtain any clue to his whereabouts. Pitou told him long afterwards, that about that period a sergeant of police had related to him, how a man with a hole in

his skull, and his pockets turned inside out, had been fished out of the Seine, whose eyes, which were wide open when found, were of such an extraordinary hue that he could not well rid himself of the impression they produced upon his mind.

Although this was by no means conclusive evidence, Michaud was never seen afterwards.

Clichette never abandoned the Countess's service. The latter, by a certain reactive impulse, not difficult to understand in one of her temperament, went much into the world after the marriage of Marie. Her receptions were among the most brilliant and fashionable of the Second Empire.

The Marquis de Laferrière was seldom seen to smile, except in the presence of F'ifine, whom he loved dearly. Nothing but the sight of her merry face was ever effectual in putting to rout the look of settled melancholy which he carried with him to the grave. He devoted the most of his time to study. He travelled much. He never married again.

Honoré and F'ifine lived for a long time

happily, in a little hôtel in the Rue St. Dominique. He is the Marquis de Laferrière now, and a senator of the French Republic.

Marie never sang in public again. Her portrait at forty was exhibited in the Salon of 1852, and now hangs in the library of the good Vicomte, in the Rue Vanneau, the pride of her children and the admiration of all comers.

Father Joseph has a successor. The good curé died peacefully in the year 1861.

It was decided by the Countess and the Vicomte, in the course of a serious conversation, not to disturb the house where Fifine was born.

We passed it the other day. No change has come to the Rue de Picpus, and the old house, with its seven pentagonal dormers, looks as dreary and desolate as ever.

THE END.



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